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FAIR ROSAMOND;

OR

THE DAYS OF KING HENRY II.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE;

BY THOMAS MILLER,

AUTHOR OF "ROYSTON GOWER," "BEAUTIES OF THE COUNTRY,"

"A DAY IN THE WOODS," ETC.

Let us sit on the ground,
And tell sad stories.

King Richard II.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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FAIR ROSAMOND.

CHAPTER I.

But yet before our comely King
The English land forsook ;
Of Rosamond, his lady fair
His farewell thus he took :
“ Oh ! I must leave my fairest flower,
My sweetest Rose a space ;
And cross the seas to famous France,
Proud rebels to abase.”

Ancient Ballad.

TIME rolled along unimpeded by all the mighty changes which followed its course ; like a ship that steadily pursues her voyage over the sea, and leaves wave after wave behind. Becket still remained in a foreign land ; his proud spirit unbroken, although he had assumed the coarse habit of the Cistercian order, and adhered to

the strict discipline of a monastic life in the Abbey of Pontigny, even after the Pope had re-invested him in his former archiepiscopal dignity. There, for the present, we must leave him. Meantime an insurrection had broken out in Brittany, which the King of France secretly abetted, and which it needed the presence of Henry to quell; nor was he long before he summoned his forces together, and entered the frontier of Normandy.

His troops were already in advance, and he himself armed from head to heel, and ready to depart, when he resolved to take his farewell of Rosamond before quitting the shores of England.

The sweet summer-day was fast drawing to a close, when Henry, followed by four faithful attendants in armour, entered the chase of Woodstock. As he rode with his ventail unclosed, the red rays of the sinking sun fell upon

his countenance, and displayed features careworn and melancholy ; as if his face during a few brief months had been wasted by the sufferings of long years. There was a calm dignity amid his sorrow, which told, that however much he was doomed to undergo, his soul was still steeled with that proud philosophy which is ever determined to endure. While his steed paced leisurely along between the tall avenues of trees, or wound past some old familiar path which revealed glades and rich patches of pasture-land in the distance, all sleeping in their green tranquillity beneath the golden sunlight which fell upon them ; he unconsciously heaved a deep sigh. His mind reverted to the scenes of other days, when the cares of state fell upon the able shoulders of his high-minded mother Matilda, and he himself stole away into those green solitudes where Rosamond, his young bride, awaited him. " Would to God," mut-

tered he to himself, " that Stephen had never resigned his crown in my favour ; but that I had still lived with her I love, and remained only Henry of Anjou, without bartering my peace of mind to ambition !" Then his thoughts turned to the Archbishop of Canterbury ; and although his brow became for a moment cloudy, it soon assumed that melancholy calm which pervades every countenance when contemplating the past, and dwelling upon bygone pleasures and remembered scenes, which can never again be recalled.

At some distance from the labyrinth was seen the gaunt form of Gamas Gobbo, looking more unearthly than common, as his parchment-coloured face caught the full hue of the setting sun ; while he went buzzing to and fro with his thin skeleton-like arms in motion, and waylaying the honey-laden bees as they returned to their hives. No sooner however

did the idiot perceive the armed horsemen, than he bounded at full speed across the glade, shot up the steep eminence under which the windings of the labyrinth extended, and dropping through an aperture, which looked as if it would scarcely admit a dog, by his loud humming, apprized Pierre de Vidal, that strangers were approaching.

The King halted near a neighbouring thicket, and dismounting, left his favourite war-horse to the care of his attendants, and proceeded on foot, his heart beating quicker as he drew nearer to the abode of his beloved mistress ; for the thoughts flashed strangely and almost unaware upon his mind, that he was doomed never to meet with her again. He threaded the well-known way, every turning of which was as familiar to him as the broadest bridle-path in the park. He passed the faithful minstrel without speaking, only laying his hand for a moment

kindly upon his shoulder, and silently patting the rough head of Gamas Gobbo, as if he had been a favourite hound : then with slow steps and aching heart, he ascended the heavy stairs, every step of which was formed of a solid beam of oak.

With a countenance mournfully pale, and eyes which but a few moments before had been overflowing with tears, Rosamond arose to meet him, but the effort she made overcame her, for she staggered and would have fallen, had not the King caught her in his arms. With eyes closed as if in death, her beautiful head hanging down like a flower which has been trampled upon, and her rich ringlets drooping over the chain armour of the monarch, there she lay, every sign of life extinguished. A shudder ran through the frame of the King as he looked upon her, which caused the scales of his armour to fill out, as if his heart was about to burst, for

he remembered that her countenance wore just the same expression, when he rescued her from the jaws of death, and laid her down senseless beside the waters of the Glyme.

“What mean these thoughts,” said he, after having in vain endeavoured by every soothing term to bring her round. “Last night I saw thy face in my sleep, just so pale and woe-begone, and now I again gaze upon thee with thoughts allied to death, and thou appearest before me just as when I bore thee with hair streaming loose, and—. She breathes again! Rosamond! dearest Rose, look once more upon me ere I depart. Oh! let me not leave thee thus care-worn, lest thy fainting image flit before me, in the tumult of battle, and the remembrance of thy pallid features unnerve my arm when I have need of its strength.”

“Henry! dearest Henry!” said Rosamond, after a long pause, and in a voice which was

scarcely audible, while she threw one of her white arms over the mailed vent-brace of the monarch, and half-elevated her lovely head to gaze upon his features in silence, as he looked down upon her through the square opening of the helmet, as if she was gazing upon him for the last time,—for she well knew that he was about to leave her.

“Speak, love,” said Henry, stooping his mailed form, and pressing her cold pale lips; “ask what thou wilt ere I depart, and it shall be thine; for within the wide domains of England, there is nothing that my love can withhold from thee.”

“Let me, then, share thy dangers,” said Rosamond. “Oh! leave me not behind thee.”

“Thy frame would but ill brook the fatigues of war,” replied Henry: “The clamour of a camp, hasty marches, and perilous sieges, cannot be endured by delicate limbs like thine.

No, Rose, I love thee too well to lead thee into dangers like these, here thou wilt be safe."

"Henry, an' thou leavest me behind," said Rosamond, in a firm but melancholy tone, while she fixed her eyes steadfastly upon him, "I have a strange foreboding that we shall never meet again."

"These are but weak and fond fancies," replied the King in a faltering voice, for the same thoughts had before disturbed himself,—
"and must be dispelled. Give not way to them, my sweet Rose, they but spring from the sorrow of separation, brief as it will be. Trust me, it is but the thought of parting that has called up these melancholy forebodings. I shall soon return, and all will again be well."

"I fear it, my lord," replied Rosamond, with a mournful shake of the head: "sad thoughts have long haunted me while I have been awake; and when asleep my dreams have been of death."

I have tried to veil these sorrowful scenes from myself, but when alone they ever break in upon me, and reveal themselves."

"Embitter not our parting with thoughts like these, my dearest Rose," said Henry with deep emotion, and enclosing her fair hand in the folds of his gauntlet. "Thou knowest I love thee far beyond what words can express, and could I but dream that danger lurked near thee, I would not for a thousand kingdoms leave thee behind. Here thou art safe; thy haunt unknown to the revengeful Eleanor; the palace of Woodstock scarce a bow shot from hence, and filled with armed men, all ready to rise at a moment's warning in thy defence, and at the beck of Pierre de Vidal. Trust me, thou art much safer here than thou wouldst be with me amid the din and tumult of war. Come," said he, placing his arm around her graceful figure, and drawing her to a strong carved oaken seat,

“I must not leave thee in this melancholy mood, although life and death hangs upon every moment that I linger with thee.”

“Thou wert ever kind to me,” replied Rosamond in the same sad voice; “nor have I ever feared danger when thou hast been at hand. But the deep sea will soon divide us, and many a broad billow will roar between myself and thee, whose sounding will bury all cries for help, were a thousand voices to stand shrieking on the shores.”

“It will not be needed, my own heart’s love,” answered Henry, deeply moved; then lifting up his eyes to the window, he added, “the sun is already burying himself in the west, a few more moments and his splendour will be hidden: so is he now dipping his golden head behind the sea that washes the base of the ancient castle on the mount of St. Michael, and shedding his dying glory over the wide wastes of Brittany.

Rosamond," added he, drawing her face to his own, and imprinting a kiss upon her lips;—"until I meet thee again, I will every night hold these moments sacred to thy memory; even in the midst of battle, I will snatch a brief space to watch the sun descend,—and waft a sigh, or a prayer, for thee to the shores of England. Thou wilt turn thy face towards it, and think of me at the self same moment of time."

"I will," replied Rosamond, a tear stealing silently down her fair cheek as she spoke, and falling upon the gauntleted hand of the monarch, which he felt not. "But I shall not need such a sign to remind me that my light has departed, when I sit in silence, with only my sorrows for companionship, until we become inseparable. I shall need nothing to tell me of thy absence. And when the sky is clouded, and no sunset trails its glory along the western steep, then

shall I think that my hope is quenched for ever; and amid the struggling clouds trace strange shapes of thy form in battle, even as I was wont to do, ere I knew that thou wert England's King; and when the dark masses closed over one bright spot in the sky, I sat shedding tears to think that thou wert so covered with the bodies of the slain, until the rack assumed strange forms, and man and horse went thundering over thee;—and then I wept to think that thou wert no more; so shall——” She pressed her hands before her face, and sobbed as if her heart was breaking; for she could no longer restrain her grief, nor get rid of the melancholy images which her fancy had conjured up.

Henry replied not, but drew her face closer to his mailed breast, while tear after tear stole down the linked armour, the coldness of which her feverish cheek scarcely felt.

“Hast thou then no request to make ere I depart,” said the monarch after a long pause, and with difficulty suppressing his own feelings, for his eyes had more than once overflowed with tears; but by a powerful effort of mind he drove the rising current back to its deep channel, and felt ashamed of his own weakness.

“I have but one, my lord,” replied Rosamond, suddenly controlling her grief, although her suppressed sobs told that the war still raged within. “It may be,” added she, heaving a deep sigh, “the last that I shall crave, and yet I fear to name it.”

“Whatever it may be,” said Henry, “if it lies within my power to fulfil it, it shall be done, and thou wilt not crave that which I cannot grant thee.”

“It is,” said Rosomand, hesitating as if afraid to trust the sound of her own voice, “that thou wilt recall the Archbishop of Canterbury, or at

least seek a reconciliation with him. I know," continued she, taking advantage of the silence, "that I ask a hard matter at thy hands, but thou wilt forgive me, if thou canst not grant my request."

Henry remained silent, whilst his countenance underwent as many changes as the face of a lake in which the clouds of heaven are mirrored as they pass on before the tempest. Then he arose and paced the apartment, slowly at first, and soon with quicker strides, which increased the more he became excited; when pausing as suddenly as a horse, which a sharp jerk of the bridle throws upon its haunches, he said, "Rosamond, recall thy wish, and this very night shalt thou depart with me, and on the morrow, embark in my own galley for Normandy."

"I cannot recall it," answered Rosamond, in a low firm voice; "the words I might change,

but the request will still be the same ; it is what I have long wished, and prayed for." Silence again reigned in the apartment for the space of several minutes.

" I will not—I must not—recall him," replied Henry, with difficulty suppressing his anger ; " the eyes of all Europe are now drawn to the contest between us ; and my honour is dearer to me than my life ! But, for thy sake," added he, as if he forced the very words from his throat against his will, " I will yield much to him ; and it shall only be some unreasonable request, such as thou thyself couldst not grant, that shall prevent our reconciliation. If he be disposed for peace with me, I will throw no obstacle in the path, but make a double return to his advances. More I cannot promise—more thou wouldst not wish me to perform."

Henry fulfilled his promise on a future day ; and had not Becket, as soon as he landed in

England, proceeded to excommunicate those who, during his absence, had opposed him, peace would no doubt have been maintained between them.

“I thank thee,” said Rosamond, arising, and leaning upon his manly bosom, “and now,” continued she, attempting to speak in a more cheerful tone, but which the trembling of her voice belied, “I can part from thee, with the hopes that when we meet again, the friend of our early love will be thy companion.” She threw her arms around Henry’s neck as she spoke, imprinted a fervent kiss upon his lips, and fell senseless upon his bosom. The last effort was too much for her feelings; for her eyes closed, with a firm conviction that she should never see him again; and the thought caused a cold shivering to run through her frame—a dizzy sensation which she could not conquer—a cold foretaste of death.

Henry lifted her upon the long carved seat on which they had just before been seated ; and, ringing a silver bell, summoned Maud into the apartment. He pointed to her ; but spoke not ; then he bent for a moment over her pale features, which, in the approaching twilight, assumed the ashy hue of death—he retreated towards the door, and returned again to press her pallid lips. He paused once more, uplifted his hands, and breathed a brief prayer for her safety. Just then, his eye caught one of her long ringlets, which fell over the oaken arm of the seat ; he drew a two-edged dagger from his breast, severed the long lock at a blow, leaving a deep incision in the wood, pressed it to his lips, and departed, his eyes still turned to where she lay, until he passed the door.

Pierre de Vidal waited without, but the excited King could do no more than seize his hand, and the firm pressure with which the

minstrel returned his grasp, while a tear gathered in his dark eye, spoke more than a thousand words. Henry again threaded the winding paths of the gloomy labyrinth ; but, ere he ventured into the park, he leant his burning brow against the cold walls, and wept like a child. He, who would have scorned to call for quarter if the dagger of his enemy had been pointed at his throat—who had waded through the gory ranks of battle, and heard the groans of the dying, had looked on death face to face without blenching, and felt the keen arrows eat through every accessible point of his armour without changing countenance ;—wept as if his manly heart would break when he parted from Rosamond. The vaulted labyrinth, which was so soon to echo with other sounds, gave back sob for sob, and the darkness which gathered around, seemed only a meet witness for the weakness of him, whose eye, on other

occasions, would cause the proudest warrior to quail, and, like the forked lightning of heaven, strike terror wherever it alighted.

“Strange mortals that we are,” thought the monarch, as he gradually recovered himself, and wiped the tears from his cheeks with the inner part of his gauntlet, “that I, who shed no tear when the tidings of my mother’s death arrived, and yet felt the arrows of grief pierce into my very soul, should be thus moved at parting only for a brief space, with the object I love. No, I will not leave her,” thought he, retracing his steps for a few paces, then again pausing suddenly ; “yet, why should I expose her to a thousand dangers? No ; it will be some comfort, amid the wear and tear of war, to know that I have still her bosom to fly to, when all dangers are past ; even the timid bird braves the thunder-cloud, and wings its way across stormy seas to gain a land of sunshine, to

build its nest, and repose in safety by its mate. Alas !" added he, "its home is torn by no convulsions—no jealousies await its return—no doubts—no fears: the lowliest serf that tills the soil, and groans under his hard task-master, sleeps a sounder sleep than Henry of England."

As Henry quitted the labyrinth, he stumbled over something at the entrance—it was Gamas Gobbo, who had taken up his station for the night; for the poor idiot seldom slept with a roof over his head during the months of summer.

"Even thou art faithful to her," said the king, again patting the head of the idiot, while the latter rubbed his rough hair against the chain-mail of the monarch, like a dog when fondled by his master,—“thou, who art scarcely possessed with more knowledge than a brute, dost fawn at her feet, and hum in her path,

whenever she walks abroad, and bringest the biggest bees to her to show thy gratitude for her protection. Alas !” added he, “ I can make thee no happier ; thou wouldst throw aside all the gold in my realm, to chase a bee, and exchange my crown and sceptre for a day’s sweet sunshine. Poor wretch ! I know thou art as faithful as a dog,” continued he, gently stroking the head of Gobbo, “ and wouldst die in the defence of those who treat thee kindly ; there, lie thee down ; thou art happier under the shade of that bramble, than I am under the canopy of my throne, when surrounded by all the chivalry of England.”

He snatched a rich velvet cloak, trimmed with costly fur, from an attendant who waited near, who was about to throw it over his shoulders, and with his own hand did Henry place it around the idiot as carefully as a fond mother who puts her child to bed ; then he departed.

Many a look did Henry give in the direction of the labyrinth, ere he quitted the park, but the darkening trees and the deepening twilight soon shut out all objects in the distance ; and, when he had once quitted the princely enclosure of Woodstock, he set off at a speed which put to the test the mettle of both man and horse, and soon overtook the last troop of his chivalry, who were on their way to embark. The next evening, a favourable breeze sprang up, and the heavy galleys were speedily in motion ; and, although Henry had never closed his eyes on the preceding night, he watched the sun sink behind the tall cliffs, as he drew the ample folds of his dalmatica around him, and laid his head upon his triangular shield to sleep, unconscious of the roarings of the billows which rolled around him. He slept sound as an infant, and dreamed that he was again walking by the banks of the Glyme, with her he loved.

History records how he gained the frontiers of Normandy, quelled the turbulent spirit of the nobles of Bretagne, and took up his abode in the strong castle of Mount St. Michael, from whence, like an eagle on a rock, his keen eye could sweep over the broad lands of Brittany. But not a page tells of his lonely walks on the highest turret of that rocky eminence at sunset, when he listened to the melancholy dash of the breakers below ; and, as he watched the God of Day gild the farthest ripple with his beams ere he sank behind the deep, wafted a prayer across the wide waste of waters for the welfare of Rosamond Clifford.

CHAPTER II.

Now I will unclasp a secret book,
And to your quick-conceiving discontents
I'll read you matter deep and dangerous ;
As full of peril, and adventurous spirit,
As to o'erwalk a current, roaring loud,
On the unsteadfast footing of a spear.

SHAKSPEARE.

GLANCING backward at our history, we must suppose Queen Eleanor to have just parted with the King, previous to his embarkation ; that the tramp of his steed was fast dying upon her ear, and she stood in the same position as when she took her cold farewell of him. Like a serpent uncoiling itself, or when, as fold after fold unwinds, its head becomes every moment nearer its victim before making the

fatal spring, so did she, as the tramp of the chargers' hoofs sounded more and more remote, gradually raise herself from her musing position, until her whole figure became erect, and she stood with head elevated, and flashing eyes that glared with almost a savage fury. "He is gone," said she aloud, and after a long pause—"and will no longer interpose, like a shield between me and my vengeance: the hour of my revenge is at hand; nor will I delay the deed for which it hungers." She took up a small silver bell, and having rung it, Oliphant Uggleshred entered the apartment.

"Are all in readiness?" said Eleanor, in a bold and brief tone, and with a look that would well have become a commander on the eve of battle.

"All as your highness ordered," replied Uggleshred, "but"—

“ But what ? ” inquired the Queen, “ bid every soldier hasten to his saddle, I have no time to parley.”

“ Your highness forgets,” said Uggleshred, unmoved by the stern demeanour of the Queen, “ that Henry may yet return to imprint a farewell kiss on the lips of Rosamond, and”—

“ Silence, villain ! ” cried Eleanor, fixing her dark eye on Uggleshred ; then suddenly altering her tone, as if she remembered that all might yet be lost if she quarrelled with the ruffian ; “ thou wouldst anger me further against yonder cursed harlot, but hast no need ; my vengeance has long been ripe. Do thou but lead the way, and I will instantly about the work.”

“ Even as it pleaseth you,” answered Oliphant ; “ but if matters fall out as I conjecture, all will then be over, and this queen of the cave

borne away beyond your reach. Better wait until the morning, when the King will be far on his way to the coast, and no fear of our plot miscarrying."

"Thou art not tampering with me?" said the Queen, looking upon the villain's face as if she there sought to read his very soul.

"Devil a bit am I," answered Uggleshred; "an' you choose we will to Woodstock instantly, but it were wisdom to abide our time."

"It may be as thou sayest," said Eleanor musing; "but hast thou explored this cavern, into which thou hast so often seen the King enter of late?—ar't sure that it is her hiding place?"

"As sure as that I am upon the nest of the plover, when I see the young ones seeking to hide themselves in the grass," answered Uggleshred. "As to exploring it, I but looked in and

saw that it was dark as a black bull's hide ; but the minstrel and Maud pass to and fro ; and trust me to finding a path."

"And the Leech?" inquired Eleanor, her countenance changing as she spoke, "hast seen him, and"—she paused as if afraid to finish the sentence.

"Obtained a phial of poison strong enough to kill Satan himself," said the ruffian,—“better never entered the lip of Crusader or Saracen."

"Speak not so loud, lest we should be overheard," said Eleanor, casting her dark eyes cautiously around the apartment; "I tell thee, Oliphant, that I would shed her blood with my own dagger; but that her father was a noble Norman, and hath in his day stood me in good stead, and"—she paused, for another thought passed through her mind, and she added, while her features kindled up

as she spoke,—“ How will the King look when he discovers the bower dark, and the nest cold, where he left his dainty dove at roost. Uggledred, I would give my life to hear the first outbreak of his grief, and glut mine eyes in his agony.”

“ I would sooner be with Beelzebub himself than see such an outburst,” said he, shrugging up his shoulders and gazing in astonishment at the savage expression of the Queen’s features.

“ Thou knowest not how sweet is revenge to an injured woman,” continued Eleanor, her passion rising as she spoke, “ when the current of her unrequited love is driven back and left to freeze in her very heart. I would have given my soul to the Evil-one,” continued she, drawing a richly inlaid dagger from her belt, “ if I could but have sheathed this in both their hearts, and left them weltering

together in the embrace of death. But how," added she, suddenly changing her mood after having walked to and fro in the apartment—"how shall we gain admittance to the palace of Woodstock?"

"They have no orders to keep out your highness," replied Oliphant, "as I learned from one who hath but little love for the minstrel. But, on the contrary, are to treat you as if nothing was amiss. It is only in case of an alarm from Pierre de Vidal that they are to betake themselves to arms. So that, when once there, we may strike down the hind at our leisure, without startling any of the herd."

"Then, to-morrow, will we take up our abode at Woodstock," said the Queen, "and until then we leave all to thy management." So saying, she quitted the apartment.

"It hath ever been held fair to enter into a

bond with the Devil and then cheat him if we can," said Ugglesred when left alone; "and although I have set my seal to this dark work, I would fain reserve yonder beauty of the cave for another doom than that of death. But I have played the game too deeply to retreat without danger," added he, again musing. "And what were I to make an effort to save her? I have once bidden high for my bargain. No;" continued he, shaking his head as he quitted the apartment, "I will see the game out; and if chance leaves any odds in my favour at the end, why, then, I will count my gains; but I would sooner face a chafed tiger, than venture to cross the path of this blood-thirsty queen in her present mood."

The next day Eleanor arrived at the palace of Woodstock, and drawing up with her retinue, demanded entrance; while Oliphant

Ugglethred with half a score of soldiers were stationed in an adjacent thicket. As the draw-bridge was down, only the huge bars of the portcullis prevented the party from making good their entry; but a man-at-arms who was pacing to and fro within the gloomy postern, refused to raise the grated door-way without the governor's orders.

“The Queen of England demands admission, sirrah,” said Eleanor, waving back the attendant who had in vain sued for entrance, and riding up to the strong fastness—“and unless the portcullis is instantly upraised, may doom you to waver over the battlements of the postern.”

“Were it King Henry himself,” replied the warrior, still pacing to and fro with the partisan in his hand, “he knows a sentinel's duty, and must bide the coming of the Governor.”

Meantime De Whycherly arrived, to whom

the keeping of the palace was entrusted, and without further parley, ordered the Queen's instant admission, adding, "My orders extend not to the entry of your Highness' attendants."

"We take the command upon ourselves," replied Eleanor haughtily, and while she spoke, the horsemen, with Uggleshred at their head, drew up: "at least," added she, seeing that the knight was about to make some resistance, "so far as it regardeth our own attendants, I trust that your orders extend not to my followers."

"So far as it regardeth the time of watch—raising the drawbridge at sunset, and admitting none after that hour," said the knight, "my commands must be enforced during the King's absence."

"We shall not need to break your rules,"

replied Eleanor, glancing at Ugglethred ; “ if we chance to prolong our sports beyond that period, we can return by the postern that faces the pleasance.” So saying, she rode into the court-yard, and resigning her palfrey to an attendant, entered the hall of the palace.

Meantime Ugglethred had beckoned aside one of the men-at-arms whom Henry had left in charge of the palace, and they retired to converse together in an angle by one of the towers. “ The King rode down yesternight,” said Oliphant, speaking as if he was certain of the fact, though at the same time asking the question.

“ True as a bird to its nest,” answered the soldier, “ and rode out of the park with his face behind him. Marry ! ’twas a marvel that his steed did not break its neck against one or other of the trees. They say love is blind ; but he

often manages to find his way, much better than those who see."

"Who guards the postern that opens upon the pleasance?" enquired Ugglethred, more bent upon business than listening to the loquacious soldier.

"Even myself," answered the soldier, "and none other, neither do I care to enquire who cometh or goeth, while Oliphant Ugglethred furnisheth me with gold pieces to spend at the Scotale. I gave trusty Timothy a solida to exchange posts with me, and no one will enquire how I came there, for one steel doublet looketh as well as another gliding along by the shadow of the wall."

"Has Pierre de Vidal crossed the drawbridge since yestereven's sunset?" continued Oliphant.

"He hath not shown himself before the postern these three days," answered the other.

“ Gobbo, or whatever you call him, went humming over the pleasance in the morning sunshine, with a gay garment looped over his shoulders, which I dare be sworn King Henry hath worn many a time. But he tore along through brake or briar whenever a bee buzzed, as if it had been the coarsest serge.”

“ All then is secure,” said Oliphant, “ and Eleanor hath stationed four as sturdy fellows in a neighbouring copse to waylay any messenger that may pass between the palace and the minstrel, as ever emptied the bags of a monk, or cut a throat on the highway. What time art thou stationed at thy post?”

“ When curfew tolls from the turrets of Godstow ?” replied the soldier, “ then I take up my station for the night ; and if thou canst leave me a flask of wine for a companion, why I shall hum all the merrier a stave until sun-

rise, when Balder the Bald will come to my relief."

"I will not forget thee," said Oliphant. "Meantime be cautious, and keep thy tongue still, but have thine eyes and ears wide open, and should aught occur that thou thinkest may be of service to our plot, do not fail to acquaint me with it." So saying, he departed, having first thrust two gold pieces into the hand of the soldier.

On the arrival of Eleanor, De Whycherly did not fail to send a messenger to apprise Pierre de Vidal of her coming; the soldier had also orders to remain in the labyrinth, and be in readiness in case it was necessary to hold communication with the Governor. But as Oliphant had stated, the Queen was prepared for this, and the messenger was seized, and conveyed by a circuitous path to Oxford, so that Roso-

mond received no warning of the near approach of her rival.

As the time drew nearer for the accomplishment of the long meditated deed, Uggleshred became more restless ; and as he crossed the narrow outlet over the moat to walk in the pleasance, he more than once thought of saving Rosamond from the vengeance of Eleanor. Her imposing beauty had long haunted the mind of the ruffian, and although he was entirely devoid of the finer feelings of love, still he would have sacrificed half the world, had it been in his possession, to have had her within his own keeping. He had several times meditated an attack upon the labyrinth, but then he was ignorant of the force kept up for her safety, and moreover dreaded meeting with the minstrel whose fame in arms was equal to his celebrity as a troubadour. One scheme how-

ever he had reserved, if all others failed ; but he had forgotten to calculate all risks, like one who sums up the advantages which will be gained by a victory, before the battle is fought. But our story now carries us back to fair Rosamond, and the labyrinth of Woodstock.

CHAPTER III.

In sooth I know not why I am so sad ;
It wearies me ; you say it wearies you :
But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
I am to learn.

I am the most unhappy woman living.

SHAKSPEARE.

TWICE had Queen Eleanor attempted to reach the abode of Rosamond, but was unable to discover the right course through the labyrinth ; and even Uggleshred gave up the search in despair. Two days had elapsed, and neither Pierre de Vidal, nor his fair mistress, were aware of the danger that lurked so near. A great change had, however, taken place in

Rosamond ; she passed long hours in silence ; and, when Maud spoke to her, she but seldom replied, but stood moping and sighing in the deep oriel, or gazing upon the dark trees or dense underwood, which hung around the high mound that roofed the labyrinth ; and only here and there showed glimpses of the distant scenery through some loop-hole between the foliage.

All that had before gladdened her soul seemed now to have changed ; her ideal world had vanished ; pleasure after pleasure had appeared but to pass away, like Time, which, once gone, is beyond all recall. Even when she ventured beyond the labyrinth, the very landscape on which her eyes had so long been accustomed to gaze with delight, had changed ; every sound, that was before cheerful, had suddenly become harsh and discordant to her ears ;

every sight wearisome, and but converting past joys into pain. The river Glyme no more rolled with the same music with which it was fraught in times gone by ; she but heard a mournful voice in the dashing of its waters—a babbling like the dreamy voices of other days, which fancy calls up in sleep.

Hour after hour would she sit in the secret pleasance which opened beyond her retreat, watching the shadows chase each other over the green grass ; or, fixing her eyes upon a gnarled and naked tree, which she remembered to have seen flourishing in all its pride, and, by some unknown contortion of the mind, she had in its ruin found a resemblance to her own fate. Often, too, would her eye wander to the distant towers of Godstow, just seen through a vista between the broad oaks ; and the remembrance of the happy hours she had spent within those

walls, fell with a coldness upon her heart—a pang of deep and almost bitter regret. A change had passed over Rosamond's spirit—she saw how much she had sacrificed only to render herself more miserable,—to be shut up like a felon, and not even to have the presence of him for whom she endured all this, to console her ; nor was the consciousness that she still retained full possession of King Henry's love, an equivalent for all that her feelings suffered. The thought of what the world would think of her when she was dead, and that her children must share her innocent shame, like a voice from within, was constantly whispering to her ; and there were moments of deep reflection, when these thoughts burst upon her, and, like a black cloud, darkened all that was before light in her bosom.

It was on the third evening after the de-

parture of Henry, that Maud persuaded her fair mistress to venture out into the park of Woodstock, for she had heard from the minstrel that there was help at hand in the palace, and neither thought of, nor feared, danger. Rosamond had partaken of no food all the live-long day, and seemed more than usually melancholy ; yet, in spite of all this, she acceded to the proposition of her faithful attendant without a murmur.

“ Put aside thy embroidery, my dear lady,” said Maud, seeing that her mistress had deposited the clue of silk in the pouch which hung from her girdle, “ thou hast worked so long upon that rose, that thy very tears have caused the colours to fade.”

“ I will sit by the waters of the Glyme,” answered Rosamond, “ and there run in another thread or twain. It was a favourite haunt

of mine, years ago, when the light-hearted Margaret Mountpenon was my companion, and we were wont to rival each other in copying the flowers which adorned the banks. Then," added she, sighing deeply, "there was a silence about the memory which was pleasing; or, when it spoke to itself, it only dwelt upon forthcoming pleasures, for the remembrance of the past brought no pain."

"Speak not so sadly, dear lady," said Maud, as she threw a rich tippet over the fair shoulders of her mistress, to which was appended a silken hood, that could be drawn over the head at pleasure,—“all will yet be well.”

They were conducted through the dark labyrinth by Pierre de Vidal, who would fain have accompanied them into the chase; but Rosamond expressed a wish that they might go alone. When they gained the open park, they

were met by Gamas Gobbo, who went buzzing round them for several moments, then bounded off in quest of his favourite amusement.

“Let us sit in the shade of this sweet woodbine,” said Rosamond, seating herself on a green bank, at a short distance from the entrance of her secret bower. Maud obeyed, and placed herself by the side of her mistress. “Dear Maud,” continued she, placing her hand familiarly upon her shoulder, “I have thought much of death of late; and, sometimes, it seems not so fearful as I was wont to deem it. ’Tis but a long sleep, unbroken by sorrow and care;—a dark night that will be chased away by some future morn breaking upon a new world, where there are no aching bosoms; it is the only medicine that can heal a broken heart.”

“Dispel this cloud from thy mind, dear lady,” said Maud; “look how cheerful all

Nature appears ; the birds fill every grove with melody, and the green leaves glitter in the broad sunshine. Why wilt thou give way to this sadness ?”

“ I have been very low of late,” replied Rosamond, sighing deeply ; “ I feel, Maud, that I can never be happy again—never, never more,” and she buried her face in her hands.

“ Thou sighest so deeply,” said Maud, “ that I feel also sad ; ’tis long since thou didst reward me with a smile ; thou art indeed sorrowful.”

“ ’Tis too true,” replied Rosamond, “ I feel my spirits sink, even to very sadness, and weeping affords me no relief.”

“ But what hath made thee so ?” inquired Maud, “ no new trouble that I wot of hath of late befallen us. Cheer thee, sweet lady, and chase away this fancied grief. What art

thou afeared of, that makes thee so unhappy?"

"Of what I know not of," replied Rosamond with a sigh; "it is some hidden danger that I fear, the uncertain dread that hath not yet come to light. I tremble at the falling of a leaf; even my own shadow hath thrice startled me to-day. Some misery is near at hand,—some danger that will ere long close upon me: sure as the gathering clouds foretell a storm, so does this dull foreboding warn me that sorrow is near the door. Oh! I had awful dreams all yesternight."

"Tell me thy dreams then," said Maud, "and I will be thy interpreter, and it shall go hard, if I extract not some hopes out of this seeming misery."

"Thou canst not," replied Rosamond in a mournful voice. "I have essayed to think on

happy and bygone scenes, have turned my thoughts to departed days, to pleasures that had no alloy, when I flew to and fro as devoid of care as a happy bird, sang to myself, and was pleased with my own voice ; when my heart made its own sunshine. I have thought of these things many times to-day," added she, uplifting her delicate hand to her face, while the tears oozed out from between her small taper fingers. "I have thought of them until even their remembrance has become sad. I can never feel happy again ; pleasure hath forsaken me for ever;" and she endeavoured in vain to stifle her rising sobs as she spoke.

"Nay, weep not, my dear lady," said the attendant, her own tears falling in large drops ; "we shall again be happy when King Henry returns, and you wot well that this sorrow is a tell-tale, and no eye sooner detecteth where it

hath had lodging than his own. "Alas!" added she, heaving a deep sigh, "mine is but sorry condolence, and if you must be sad, mine eyes will weep for companionship; yet know I no cause for these tears."

Just then a favourite fawn, which had followed them from the labyrinth, came tripping over the greensward with a faded garland of flowers around its neck. It lifted up its bright eyes to Rosamond's face, and receiving no sign of recognition, rested its sleek and beautiful head upon her knee.

"And thou also lovest me," said Rosamond, placing her white hand gently upon its head, and lowering her stately neck, until her lovely ringlets fell over, and rested upon the fawn. "Maud," added she, in a voice melancholy sweet, "thou wilt be kind to this pet when I am dead, and see that it is cared for when

the nights are a-cold, and I am in my grave.”

“Break not my heart, dear mistress,” exclaimed Maud, sobbing deeply, “when thou art in thy grave, there will be nothing on earth that poor Maud will care to live for.”

But Rosamond heard, or regarded her not; for she had broken off a long branch of trailing woodbine which overhung the seat, and was wreathing it around the neck of the fawn, while the beautiful favourite kept licking her hands as they were busily employed in the task. “It is the last garland that Rosamond will weave for thee,” said she, arranging the flowers as she spoke. “We shall never more trip over the sunny glades together, my innocent companion; our summer rambles are at an end; we have just outlived the flowers, and meet it is that we should die. Thou mayest look up

at me with that soft black eye of thine," added she: "would that I were thy sister, that we might ramble together all day long, browsing on the tender grass, and drinking of the waters of the sweet Glyme! But no, I would not have thee aught akin to me, the fever and the fret, and the slumberless nights that I have passed, until despair hath left no room for even hope, would dim thy sinless eye. I would not that thou wert Rosamond."

"Come, my sweet lady," said Maud, rallying, "let us wander along the banks of the Glyme, and watch this lovely sunset reflected back by the deep waters, and look at our favourite, sporting with his own shadow as we have done heretofore."

"I cannot walk for very weariness," answered Rosamond. "I would fain not wander by the Glyme now. Oh God! that its waters had

closed over me for ever when I stumbled on its shore,—what misery had I been spared !”

“ Wilt thou not then walk down by the hazel copse ?” continued Maud, “ or mark the twilight closing in above the old oaks ?—such sights have driven our cares away ere now.”

“ I would not stir a foot in that path,” answered Rosamond ; “ it was our favourite haunt when I sojourned at Godstow. Oh ! that I could recall the past, and become again what I then was ! No, I will never more set foot in those shades ; such tranquil spots are too beautiful for the unhappy to dwell in.”

“ Shall I then sing to thee ?” continued Maud, still endeavouring to divert her thoughts from the melancholy channel. “ Come ! thou wert not wont to thwart my wishes when I endeavoured to please thee.”

“ Thou canst not comfort me, dear Maud,”

replied Rosamond in the same mournful voice. “Wouldst thou sing a sorrowful song? Marry! I am too sad now even to hold sympathy with thy lay. Shouldst thou sing of love, it would but be striking the chord from which my sorrow first sprung. Didst thou breathe of hope; my thoughts are far away with despair. Did thy lay touch on pleasure; it would but remind me that mine have for ever fled. No! thou canst not comfort me, dear Maud. But here is a book,” added she, drawing it from her pouch, “written in a fair hand by some Saxon bard; it was given me by the Archbishop of Canterbury long before he left England:—would to God that he had never gone! If thou wouldst do aught, read me a page or two, and I will listen to thee; mayhap I shall feel more calm when thou hast done.”

“What shall I read to thee?” enquired

Maud, unclasping the richly bound book ; the pages of which glittered with gold and flowers, and all those gaudy devices with which the manuscripts of that period were decorated.

“ Even what first befalleth,” replied Rosamond ; “ it may be that we shall alight upon some passage that will clear away these clouds of fear and doubt ; or the better arm us for what is to come.”

Maud obeyed, and in the Saxon read as follows :*—

“ For thee is a house built
Ere thou wert born.
For thee was a mould shapen
Ere thou of thy mother camest.
Its height is not determined,
Nor its depth measured.

* The following poem is from a volume of Homilies in the Bodleian Library, (MSS. 343) and is supposed to have been written in the time of Henry II. ; it has been quoted before in several works.

Nor is it closed up
However long it may be
Until I bring thee
Where thou shalt remain,
Until I shall measure thee
And the sod of earth."

"I will read no further," said Maud, "'tis like looking in the grave to comfort one's dolfulness."

"Where only comfort and peace can at last be found," answered Rosamond; "read on, or give me the book; my fate is sealed."

Maud obeyed, and she thus proceeded:—

"Thy house is not
Built high and timbered.
It is unhigh and low:
When thou art in it
The heel-ways are low,
The side-ways unhigh.
The roof is built
Thy breast full nigh;
So thou shalt in earth

Dwell full cold.
Dim and dark,
Doorless is that house,
And dark it is within,
Where thou art fast detained :
And Death holds the key.
Loathly is that earth-house,
And grim to dwell in ;
There thou shalt dwell
And worms shall share thee.
Thus thou art laid
And leavest thy friends—
Thou hast no friend
That will come to thee,
Who will ever enquire
How thou likest that house ?
Who shall ever open
For thee the door,
And seek thee ?
For soon thou becomest loathly,
And hateful to look upon."

"Close the book ; I will hear no more,"
said Rosamond, with a firmness that seemed
the more startling when compared with her
former despondency. "*Rosa mundi !* there is

no flattery in Death ; thou wilt become loathly and hateful to look upon. *Rosa mundi !*” added she, again sinking into her sorrowful tones ; “ how would the worms exult, if they could but know that she they fed upon had had her beauties chaunted by minstrels, and praised by the lips of a king. Rose of the world ! alas ! even my ashes may be despised in a future age, and scattered upon the winds by some stern churchman, as being unworthy of the grave.”

“ Be not cast down, my dear lady !” exclaimed Maud, throwing her arms around Rosamond’s neck ; “ we must all die ; and even death is not so gloomy as this miserable minstrel hath made it. Nay, he telleth not the truth ; for our friends will come to see us when we are dead ; even as thou and I have wept over thy mother’s grave together, until we believed that

she was but asleep, and must have been warmed by the sunbeams that beat so brightly upon her grave. He is an unfeeling minstrel who wrote these lines, and does not deserve to be inquired after when he is dead : I hate him for making thee talk thus.”

“ My mother’s grave !” echoed Rosamond, disregarding Maud’s censure of the poet ; “ I dare not kneel beside it now,—dare not prostrate myself where the lowliest serf that tilled the earth on my father’s wide domains may yet bend to offer up a prayer for the dead, lest she should rise and upbraid me for bringing dishonour upon her grave, and blame me for my father’s death. Yet,” added she, speaking to herself, “ God above knoweth my innocence ; and last night my mother’s spirit visited me in sleep,—bent over me with the same benignant aspect as she looked upon me when I was

worthy of her love ; and a tear lingered upon her pale face,—the only accuser of my guilt. And shall I then dwell with thee hereafter?" added she looking upward ; " hear thy voice speaking in the same kind tone that it was wont to address me in, in days of yore? Oh ! for the certainty of this ! and I would hug death as a welcome brother." While she spoke, the sinking sun, which had been buried a moment under a cloud, blazed forth in all his splendour, and cast around her a flood of radiance, and she stood amid the glare of sloping light in all her beauty, like an inhabitant of heaven. A faint smile broke over her features, as she watched the decline of the sudden brightness ; and her fancy traced the form of her sainted mother in the trailing glory, as if beckoning her to another home beyond the golden clouds !

They walked back to the entrance of the

labyrinth, and Rosamond again seated herself upon the short dry grass, with which the base of the high embankment was overgrown. She spoke not for several moments; but drawing the half-finished folds of embroidery from the pouch or pocket, she was soon busied in working a rose-leaf. "Maud," said she, after a long pause, "shall I tell thee what I dreamed yesternight?"

"An' it will give you no pain," answered the other, in a voice more sorrowful than Rosamond's; "I would fain hear it; and yet—"

"I will tell it thee," said Rosamond, interrupting her, while her beautiful fingers were busied in their task, and the last beams of the summer sun gilded the mound by which they sat. "I dreamed that I was a queen, and that Henry sat beside me pale as death; and before us stood the Archbishop of Canterbury,

surrounded with a thousand monstrous shapes, who held in their hands skulls and cross-bones, and moped and mowed before me, while in hollow sepulchral voices they hailed me as queen. Then I thought my father placed a crown upon my brow, and that his hands were cold as the icicles of winter; and yet I knew that he was dead: my mother was also there, and she alone smiled upon me. Then came Eleanor, and lifted a golden goblet to my lips, from which I drank: I fain would not have sipped; but her eye told me that I must drink, and I shuddered as the moisture passed between my lips,—it was cold and bitter as death; then—”

“Tell me no more,” said Maud with an imploring look, her voice faltering as she spoke.

“My dream is nearly told,” continued Rosamond; “for then I felt my head grow giddy, and fancied myself about to fall from a tall

precipice,—below me all was darkness. Then I thought that thou didst stretch out thine hands towards me: I felt, but could not see thee, for my eyes had become very dim; and although I heard thy voice, I understood not the words thou didst utter, but felt myself gradually sinking into the deep chasm beneath; at length I fell—and in falling awoke. I attempted to shriek, but my voice failed me, and I—”

She raised her eyes when she had done speaking, and beheld Queen Eleanor within a few paces of where she sat. Rosamond uttered a loud shriek, and fled into the labyrinth. “Follow, knaves!” exclaimed Eleanor to Uglethred and four men-at-arms who had been sheltered in an adjacent copse, while she herself rushed foremost, like an enraged lioness in pursuit of the hunter who has stolen her cubs.

But just as she was about to enter the winding passages, Gamas Gobbo rushed out headforemost, and with such force, that he pitched full upon her breast, and the Queen measured her length upon the greensward. Maud was about to run past her fallen Highness, when she was caught by one of the soldiers, while Gobbo rushed back into the labyrinth; his loud buzzing was heard for a moment or two, until the sound was lost in the distance of the labyrinth.

The enraged Queen arose, with her hair dishevelled and falling over her flushed and angry features, while her eyes seemed to shoot forth fire, as they turned from one countenance to another, until at length they alighted upon Maud, who returned her angry glance without quailing.

“This is her of whom you spoke,” said

Eleanor, addressing herself to Uggleshred, who answered,—“The same.”

“If thou wouldst save thy life,” continued the savage Queen, looking at Maud as if she would strike her to the earth with a glance,—“lead us to the abode of yonder harlot. Dost understand me?” continued Eleanor, raising her voice, for Maud replied not. “Conduct us through this labyrinth to the hateful presence of thy mistress.”

Maud, who was the daughter of as brave a knight as ever sheathed a limb in mail, fixed her searching eyes on Eleanor, while her bosom heaved again beneath its gathering wrath, and as she replied in the fiercest tones that her tongue could utter, she made an attempt to spring upon the Queen, and had not her arms been held, would soon have buried her nails in Eleanor’s cheeks, while thus she spoke:—

“Cursed and cast-off harlot! thou art not worthy to kiss the ground that my mistress treads upon;” and she spat upon the Queen as she spoke, while her whole frame trembled with passion. “Even the fool, Louis, would not have thee with all thy possessions, for he found the slaver of the Saracen upon thy hateful lips. Oh! that my arms were free,” added she, clenching her teeth, and shaking her head, “I would tear the very eyes out of thy head, thou Saracen w——, thou wert a very bye-word in the camp of the Crusaders; and on that Holy Land, where others went to expiate their sins, didst thou pander to thy hateful lust. Thou art not worthy to be my mistress’s hound.”

Eleanor sprang forward, with her hand upon her girdle; but the dagger had slipped from her belt when she fell, or never word more would Maud have spoken, for the determination

of death sat upon her brow. Uggleshred, (who would have laughed outright at these home-thrusts of the maiden's at any other time,) perceived the danger, and ere the Queen had picked up the weapon, said, "We are losing time, and the taking away the life of this spirited wench, will avail us nothing in the discovery of her mistress."

"Thou refusest to conduct us through this labyrinth?" said Eleanor, now uplifting her dagger as she spoke.

"I will die first," answered Maud, without exhibiting a sign of fear. Eleanor set her teeth together, her hand trembled a moment as she clutched the dagger: she hesitated to strike, it was but for a moment; another instant of time, and it would have lodged in as true a heart as ever beat in the bosom of a woman; but that short delay, brief almost as our breathing,

saved her life, for Pierre de Vidal rushed in between them, and at one blow nearly severed the arm of the soldier who held Maud. Again was the ponderous sword upheaved, and made a circle of light in the gathering gloom as it swung over the head of Eleanor, and would have clove her from the scull to the teeth, had not his arm been seized by Oliphant Uggleshred, just as it was about to deal the fatal blow.

“Cursed be thine arm!” said the minstrel, dropping the sword, and instantly fastening his knuckles between the throat and gorget of Uggleshred, and bearing him to the earth. Eleanor gazed a moment or two upon the struggle as they grappled together, and bade the soldier fall back who had rushed to the aid of Oliphant; for as one was wounded, it required the other two, to hold Maud. There was a look of savage

triumph on the countenance of Eleanor as she beheld the features of Ugglethred blacken in the deepening twilight, and heard his heavy breathing, and the awful rattling in his throat, for he was already half strangled ; and at any other time she would have hastened the death of the ruffian ; for she well knew that in his bosom was deposited many of her darkest secrets. Nay, she even then hesitated an instant, whether or not to leave him to the death that was all but accomplished ; but remembering how necessary he was to the fulfilment of her revenge upon Rosamond, she sprung forward, run the point of her dagger over the back of the minstrel's hand, causing the blood to follow the stroke, and thereby weakening the grasp : and at the same time motioning the soldier to come to her assistance.

Pierre de Vidal was himself too much ex-

hausted to struggle with this new adversary ; and by the aid of the savage Queen, his hands and feet were speedily secured, and he lay bound upon the greensward. It was several minutes before Uggleshred recovered ; and by this time the soldiers had struck a light, —for they had provided themselves with torches,—the arms of Maud were also safely secured.

“Cleanse this dagger,” said the Queen, throwing it to Uggleshred when he arose, for it had fallen into the blood, with which the ground was by this time plentifully stained. “I little deemed that my own hand would ever be raised to save thy life.”

Uggleshred obeyed, and only muttered to himself, “It is needed to accomplish a bloodier business ;” but expressed no thanks. Eleanor glanced upon his countenance, which shone

redly in the torchlight; and by the knitting of her brows, seemed as if she read his thoughts.

They now proceeded to explore the labyrinth. Maud, with her hands bound, was driven along between two of the armed attendants; while the wounded soldier was left bleeding and groaning without. Eleanor had, however, with her own hands, bound up his wound with her scarf or peplum, which was worn much after the manner of a modern veil. Pierre de Vidal was also left without, bound hand and foot.

The smoky torches threw a red and lurid light over the low-browed and vaulted labyrinth; and as the ruddy glare was flashed back by the armour of the soldiers, produced just such an effect as we love to gaze upon in the rich paintings of Salvator Rosa, where that great master has peopled some shaggy cave with his

banditti: but never did canvass show such a form as that of Queen Eleanor as she marshalled the way, with a torch in one hand, and a dagger in the other; while her arm was stained with blood, and her dark hair fell in wild disorder down her cheeks and neck, as her eyes glared round with a collected, but savage expression.

Passage after passage did they traverse, Eleanor still leading the way with her garments disordered; and as she waved her torch to and fro,—now to look down into some of those gloomy depths which had never been explored for ages,—then again to examine the distant darkness, and see if there was any outlet through the arched roof,—she looked like the fabled spirit of Death, who had lost her way while conducting her silent companions to the halls of Pluto.

From time to time she glanced upon Maud, seeking, as if in a chart, to trace in her countenance some mark that might denote the right path. But the face of the maiden was firm, as if chiselled in marble; and although her heart beat high, not a sign betrayed any emotion; for while the Queen passed the torch before her, she only saw the same sullen and collected expression, which had from their first entry been imprinted there.

Oliphant Ugglesred had lingered behind; and as Eleanor was by this time considerably a-head, and Maud at some distance from the soldiers, he whispered into her ear, not to be afraid, for all would yet end well. He had scarcely passed her before the Queen rushed by, holding the torch to the ground; and having gone back for some space, she again led the way, exclaiming with a shrill savage laugh,

which sounded awfully through the vaulted avenues, “ She forgot to put up her silk before she departed ; and although she went somewhat quicker than a snail, yet here is her trail.”

Ugglethred held his torch to the ground ;—it was even as she said,—Rosamond in her flight had dropped the clew of scarlet silk from her lap, and as one end was passed through the sheathe in her girdle, it became unwound, and at once betrayed her path. A deep groan escaped the lips of Maud at this discovery ; and Eleanor turned upon her with just such a malicious grin as Satan is supposed to give, when the foot of a righteous man hath slipped from its even standing.

There was now no further difficulty ; the few menials who waited upon, and might yet have aided Rosamond, had flown to such hiding

places as were only known to themselves. Gamas Gobbo alone dared to show his teeth before them ; but he, like a dog, kept barking and retreating, until one of the soldiers made a cut at him with his sword, and he fled before them.

True as a bloodhound to its track, did Eleanor follow the silken clue,—she came to the foot of the tower—it was still there :—step by step, like a silent guide, it pointed out the way ; —there was no obstacle,—not an arm was uplifted to contest the passage. They entered the chief apartment, which was dark, until their torches broke the gloom, and before the images of the Madonna and child, with clasped hands, and cheeks bedewed with tears, knelt fair Rosamond.

CHAPTER IV.

Let me have
A dram of poison ; such soon-speeding gear
As will disperse itself through all the veins,
That the life-weary taker may fall dead ;
And that the trunk may be discharged of breath
As violently, as hasty powder fired
Doth hurry from the fatal cannon's womb.

SHAKSPEARE.

PRAYER hath power to disarm the evil-one ;—
it can reach the star-paved vault, and even the
ear of God himself, when thrice ten thousand
hallelujahs peal through the golden domes,
hymned by cherubim and seraphim, and all the
winged ranks of Heaven : the devils themselves
feel it and tremble. On the hearts of the
children of men only is it lost ;—vengeance
hath no regard for it,—the iron gates of revenge

are closed upon it,—it passes like a breeze over a lake chained down with the ice of a deep winter, and raises not a ripple.—Remorse lags behind the murderer;—the angel of pity follows the heels of death : and they range themselves beside the bier when it is too late;—even the tears of penitence drop not, until those for whom they are shed are unconscious that they fall. Our sympathies too often awaken when they are of no avail:—our regret comes when it is useless; and we sorrow for the deed done, which we never sought to prevent. Our good intents are but shadows cast before us in the morning, which at night we find far behind. Our best resolutions are but the frost-work on glass;—we breathe over them and they vanish. As the world was before the flood, so it still remains; and were the billows again to overwhelm us, but few would be found worthy, to

enter the ark of mercy. But these are thoughts that have grown out of the still midnight ;—the mere fancies that precede a scene of death, and may vanish with the sunshine of the morrow.

Eleanor stood for a few moments over her victim, like a dark thunder-cloud lowering above the goodly oak, before the bolt is launched that prostrates it for ever. As her tall figure drew nearer, the form of Rosamond seemed to shrink before it ; like a dove burying itself in its nest, while the wings of the fierce hawk flap coldly above her. The trembling victim raised her imploring eyes to the figure of the holy Virgin ; but even her face seemed to have changed ;—the benignant smile which Rosamond's fancy had in former days conjured up, seemed to have passed away, and she appeared as if only regarding her with a cold stony look ;—even the God-child had, to her imagination, some-

thing stern in its countenance;—all around seemed to say, “thou must die!”

She ventured to turn her head as she knelt,—it was an unconscious movement,—her eyes also raised themselves of their own accord,—it might be that she looked up towards Heaven; but there only glared the fiery comet that denoted death,—the revengeful countenance of Eleanor hung over her. She uttered a loud shriek, and fell upon the floor. Maud was left without in the charge of the soldiers; so that only the Queen and Uggleshred were in the apartment.

“Hast thou got the phial from Belton!” said Eleanor.

“It is there!” said Uggleshred, pointing to the table, without evincing the least emotion; “but she will need a goblet to quaff it from.”

“Here is one,” said Eleanor, taking a silver

cup from a niche, and examining it minutely ; “ the very goblet,” added she, “ which I gave to Henry in France, and in which I drank to him at our own nuptials ; — cursed be the remembrance ! But here is that which will sweeten the bitter draught,” continued she, emptying the poison into the goblet ; “ rouse her, Ugglethred, to pledge the health of Henry of England.”

“ What would you with me ?” said Rosamond, starting up wildly, and throwing her hair back ; “ what wrong have I done, that ye cast such menacing looks upon me ? Whom have I injured, that ye seek to harm me ?”

Eleanor drew her mantle back with one hand, and fixing her baleful glance upon her like the fabled basilisk, as if she would strike her dead with her eyes ; while a cold-blooded scorn curled her haughty lips, and her nostrils

dilated like that of a savage when he is said to smell the blood of his enemy, as she exclaimed, “Cunning harlot ! I do but demean myself to waste a word upon thee. Is it nothing to step in between me and the affections of the King ? to lay out thy allurements and wean him from his Queen ?—to sow dissension in our bosoms, and cause him to leave the mighty affairs of his realms to hold dalliance with a strumpet like thyself ? Couldst thou fly at none other game ? Would none but a king suit thy dainty taste, to pinch and play with thy pallid cheeks ? Poor pitiful wretch ! I do thee too much honour to administer with my own hand the death that shall crown thy ambition.”

“I am not what thou hast named me,” said Rosamond, in a low, but firm voice. “God is witness that I am no harlot ! that I have never sought to sow dissension between thee and his

Highness ; but that long before I heard of thy name, or knew——” she paused—buried her face in her hands, and added, — “ Heaven knows my innocence !”

“ What art thou then ?—speak !” said Eleanor, springing forward and grasping her by the arm, and dragging her towards the light, with as much ease, as if she had but seized the wrist of a child. “ Art thou his wife ?—Down on thy knees, and swear by the Holy Virgin, that thou wert married to Henry before he knew me, and I will forgive thee. Bring me the damning proofs !” added she, her voice rising as she spoke, “ and confirm it in the eyes of all England, and I will give thee such a dower as never fell to the share of a Norman daughter. Thou tremblest !” continued she, grasping her wrist tighter : “ Thy voice falters !—Harlot, thou liest !” and she drove her back with such force

that Rosamond would have fallen had she not caught by the figure of the Madonna.

“Holy Virgin, protect me !” said Rosamond, folding her hands, and lifting up her beautiful eyes to Heaven, while her fair cheeks were pale as death ; “grant me strength to endure this trial, then take me to thyself.”

“Confess, lady,” said Uggleshred, who saw the struggle which was passing in the breast of Rosamond, and would have given his life to have accomplished a separation between the King and Eleanor. “Confess, lady, this is no time to think of past promises, and lovers’ vows. If he is thy husband, speak it at once.”

“I have nothing to confess,” answered Rosamond. “Heaven knows that I am innocent, and never entertained any evil wish against the Queen.”

“There is some mystery in this affair,” said

Ugglethred, turning to Eleanor; "were it not better to await the return of the King, and confront them face to face?"

"Hold thy peace, fool," replied the angry Queen; "art thou also in league with this concubine; and seekest to elude my vengeance by gaining time? No!" added she sternly, and seizing the goblet as she spoke, "her day of mercy is past. Here," continued she, holding the cup in one hand and brandishing the dagger in the other. "I give thee thy choice, drain me this goblet to the very dregs, or with my own hand I will let out thy lustful blood."

"Oh have mercy on me!" exclaimed Rosamond, throwing herself on her knees, and laying hold of Eleanor's garment. "Thou art thyself a mother! oh, spare me for the sake of my children."

"Wert thou my daughter, I would show thee

no mercy," replied the cruel Queen; "loose thy hold, viper! and implore me no longer, lest I set my heel upon all thy poisonous brood, and crush them as I would the eggs of a cockatrice. Answer me, wilt thou drink, or compel me to defile my hands with thy blood?"

"Oh, spare my life," continued Rosamond, still kneeling; "let me not taste of death so young; leave me to end my days in the Nunnery of Godstow, and I will never look upon Henry's face again, never set foot beyond those sacred walls."

"Thy words will as soon remove the strong walls of this tower from their place as me from my purpose," replied Eleanor, her brow growing darker as she spoke. "I am no reed to be shaken by every ripple: hadst thou an hundred tongues to plead with, they should not save thy life. Thou shalt die! therefore, choose thy

death instantly. I have nursed my revenge too long to abandon it at a moment like this."

"Grant me then a brief space for prayer," said Rosamond, in a more collected manner; "and may Heaven show you more mercy at the hour of death than you now extend to me."

"The moon is climbing above the dark trees," said Eleanor, glancing through the casement, and gazing on the bright orb of night, which was fast scaling the topmost branches. "When she hath past the highest bough, thou shalt die."

"Then is my hour indeed at hand," replied Rosamond, glancing at the sign, and without averting her face she folded her hands in prayer. Her lips moved, but still her eyes were fixed upon the moon; and although it arose calm and cloudless up a summer sky, thickly clustered with stars, yet never to her fancy did it make

such speed, when, sailing through the stormy heavens, it passed cloud after cloud like an arrow. She tried in vain to pray. She remembered the days when she had gazed through the same casement awaiting the return of Henry. Then her memory flew to her father's castle,—and oh! with what different emotions had she beheld the queen of night rise up and scatter her silver beams on her bower window.

She tried in vain to pray. The remembrance of other days came gushing upon her heart, and she fell with her face upon the floor, and wept bitterly.

Eleanor also watched with impatience the rising orb; half her disk already stood bold and bare upon the brow of Heaven, making the deep blue of the night around her look darker. But the Queen's face still retained the same cold, cruel expression; not a cloud had

faded from her brow ;—her compressed lips and steady eye told that she was firm to her purpose.

Ugglethred only seemed to contemplate the scene without emotion ; or if he did now and then gaze upon the countenance of Rosamond, her face only recalled a former scene, and he regretted that he had not accomplished the deed.

“ It is time,” said Eleanor, in a voice which, like the sound of the last trumpet, when it shall awaken the dead, caused Rosamond to spring instantly upon her feet, and without uttering a word, she held out her arm for the goblet. With steady hand and fixed eye, and such a look as would have driven the blood back into the boldest heart, did Eleanor deliver the cup to her trembling victim. Rosamond held it in her hand for a moment, uplifted her eyes to

Heaven, while her lips were seen to move, she then closed them—drained the cursed cup to the dregs,—and uttering a deep groan, fell upon the floor.

Uggleshred lifted her on the oaken settle, and she lay pale and almost breathless, in the same position as when the King took his farewell of her ;—even her hair had fallen over the very same spot as when Henry severed from it the lock. She called on the name of Maud several times ; and when Eleanor quitted the apartment, she ordered the attendant to be released, adding, “ Thy mistress hath need of thee ;” for she waited not to witness her death. When Maud reached the apartment, her fair mistress was speechless, and a feeble pressure of the hand was the only sign she gave of recognition. We will not dwell upon the sorrow of the attendant ; it was such as

made her wish for death ; and grief without remorse can extend no further.

It was past midnight when the group again entered the labyrinth to depart ; but as Eleanor had taken up the silken clue while treading the passages (for the damp soil of the cavern rendered it necessary to be gathered, as it was difficult to trace it on the ground) the whole had been thrown up, ravelled and broken at the inner entrance ; and they were now at a loss to retrace their steps. Ugglethred led the way, bearing one of the torches ; and as he was anxious to be first in the park, to communicate with two accomplices whom he had ordered to await him without (for he still meditated a daring deed), he kept considerably a-head of the party. Several times was he compelled to retrace his steps ; and often did the group halt to see if they could discover any signs on the

roof, or along the damp sides of the labyrinth, which were in many places overgrown with fungi, and all those vegetable matters which hasten decay,—that might guide them aright. The party halted where three passages branched off in three several ways, and were at a loss which to take. Oliphant boldly marched along the broadest, holding his torch aloof, while the rest awaited his return ; but when he reached the end, the torch suddenly disappeared, and a hollow plashing sound was only heard beyond the darkness.

Eleanor was the first to snatch a torch from one of her mailed followers ; and hurrying to the spot, she halted on the verge of the dark and deep well into which Uggleshred had fallen. Far below was heard the struggling of the victim ; and while the water rattled in his throat, and the deep dashing which he made to

keep himself on the surface, sounded hollowly and fearfully through the vaulted galleries, he became aware of the light, which fell with a faint shimmering on his dying eyes: and in tones which were inaudible he attempted to make known some secret; but the name of "Rosamond" was all that reached the ear. Just at that moment the head of Gamas Gobbo was seen thrust through an aperture in the roof which overlooked the well, and while he twisted his sallow features into every hideous grimace, (as his face showed horribly in the red and murky light,) and kept up a loud and savage buzzing which he accompanied by gnashing his teeth; he looked like one of those evil spirits who are supposed to await the death of the wicked, and hurry off their souls to eternal perdition. And when the last plashing sound had ceased, and the deep gurgling of the throat told that the

dark waters had closed over their victim, the idiot also became silent: and amid the fearful awe which reigned around, the gloom of the cavern, and the savage features of the idiot, which appeared unearthly in that red and supernatural-looking light, Eleanor felt for the first time a cold shuddering pervade her frame. It was, however, but for a moment, for she remembered that in the gloomy depths below slept the only mortal she feared,—one who had too long been a treasurer of her secrets. She again cast her eyes downward, while her features were lighted up by a look of savage triumph, and half muttered to herself, “So perish all mine enemies!”

She was suddenly startled from her fiendish reverie by the sound of footsteps, approaching from the outer windings of the labyrinth; and Pierre de Vidal, followed by De Whycherly, and

several men in armour approached. The three soldiers who attended Eleanor were unprepared to make any resistance, and with a doggish and sullen reluctance, submitted themselves as prisoners.

“ You also,” said the knight, approaching Eleanor, “ I must remand, until we have discovered whether or not the Lady Rosamond is safe ; if no harm hath befallen her, you shall speedily be restored to liberty.”

“ Unhand me, knave !” said the Queen, drawing her dagger ; but two of the soldiers taking their signal from the eye of their leader, sprang forward and secured her arms. She threw the weapon into the deep well, and added, “ Work your will upon me ;—the deed of vengeance is accomplished !”

“ Alas ! our aid hath arrived too late,” said the minstrel in a mournful voice, and leaning

his brow on the cold wall of the labyrinth ;
“ the deadly serpent hath been beforehand in
the nest of the dove ;—the fairest bird that ever
nestled in bower, is no more !”

But the tears of the faithful minstrel were of
no avail. He had done all that could be done
to save his mistress ; for when Gamas Gobbo
(who had managed to escape as soon as Eleanor
passed the labyrinth) unloosed the cords by
which he was bound, he flew to the palace with
the speed of a deer, and summoned Hugo de
Whycherly to the rescue.

Eleanor and her attendants were led forth
prisoners to the palace of Woodstock ; and the
knight despatched one of his followers to the
Nunnery of Godstow, with orders for the Abbess
to bear away immediately the body of fair
Rosamond ; while Pierre de Vidal entered the
tower, and knelt beside Maud to weep ;—the

poor idiot also glided with stealthy step into the silent apartment.

Scarcely conscious of what had happened, Gobbo seated himself on the floor, and swayed his body to and fro with an uneasy motion, keeping up at the same time a low humming, scarcely louder than the murmuring of a bee ; but there was a mournfulness in the sound, very different from what he made when sallying forth into the sunshine. Pierre de Vidal knelt beside the form of his mistress ; and while his fingers were linked in silence within those of Maud, he took the cold pale hand of Rosamond and pressed it to his lips ; while tear after tear stole down his olive cheeks, and the deep sobs of Maud, and the low mournful hum of the idiot, were the only sounds that broke the silence of that gloomy chamber. Even the silver lamp which shed its flickering light over

the pale features of Rosamond, had burnt low, as if it was in the act of expiring ; or shared in the deep gloominess which had fallen on all around.

The stars were still in the sky, and the broad moon was fast wheeling to the west, when a procession of nuns were seen moving in solemn order through the sylvan solitudes of Woodstock : they bore a bier, on which rested the body of fair Rosamond. They chaunted a low dirge as they moved along through the green avenues, which fell with a solemn sound on the surrounding silence ; or was given back by the woodland echoes. At the foot of the bier walked the minstrel and Maud ; while Gammas Gobbo headed the group, and accorded his humming to the melancholy dirge. Sometimes the procession wound along through an open glade, on which the moon threw her declining

rays ;—then again the white drapery of the nuns was seen gliding along some gloomy avenue, the deep umbrage of which shut out the moonlight, until they were lost at a turning of the road ; and only the sounding of their voices was heard as they grew faint and afar off,—then they became more remote,—and all again was still. The procession reached the Nunnery of Godstow just as the “ grey-eyed morn ”

“ Checkered the eastern clouds with streaks of light.”

CHAPTER V.

How smooth and even they do bear themselves !
As if allegiance in their bosom sat,
Crowned with faith and constant loyalty.

I must show out a flag and sign of love,
Which is indeed but sign.

SHAKESPEARE.

LIKE the shifting scenery in a theatre, so must our chapters be supposed to pass over time and space, and our readers prepare themselves for the changes which nearly six years had wrought. Passing by all that Becket had suffered during his long exile, and the attempts made to bring about a reconciliation between him and Henry,

by the Pope and the King of France, and which had hitherto failed ; we shall resume our narrative at the final conference between the King and Primate.

In a spacious and most pleasant meadow, that sloped down to the border of the river Loire (whose waters murmur for miles through the sunny vales of France), the chivalry of England, and the flower of her rival warriors, were assembled in honour of the interview which was that day to take place between the King and the Archbishop. It was one of those sweet summer mornings, such as only rise on the land of the vine, and shed their golden beams over the birth-place of minstrelsy, that now broke upon the long lines of white tents, and was flashed back by the armour of a thousand warriors. The silver trumpets rang out clear and shrill ; and their

deep challenges were answered back by a hundred echoes, which played along the broad river ; while the neighing of the steeds mingled with the loud tramping which shook the firm earth, and the low hum of voices from the armed throng, fell with a cheering sound upon the spirits of the beholders, and sent the blood racing merrily through the veins. Along the smooth greensward, which stretched between the opposing ranks of chivalry, rode Henry of England and Louis of France, in deep converse together ; and ever and anon, as they wheeled round their proud war-horses before the front of the royal tent, to confine their measured ride within the limits of their forces, they looked anxiously out on the distance from which they expected the Primate. After a few turnings, the brow of Henry began to darken, and his speech to evince impatience ;

for the hour appointed was now past ; and, as he had made a great sacrifice of feeling in granting the interview, no marvel that he thought himself slighted.

“ Some mischance may have befallen him,” said Louis, in reply to an outbreak of Henry’s.

“ Pshaw !” replied the King of England, impatiently ; “ thou knowest him not so well as myself ; it is his pride that keeps us thus waiting. Were His Holiness the Pope here, he would expect him to make some concession. By the true Lord ! I am half inclined to strike my tent and withdraw. The sun hath long since passed the appointed mark on the dial.”

“ There is no need of that,” replied the Majesty of France ; for, yonder comes the procession ; and I trust, good cousin, that thou wilt, for once, so shape thy discourse,

that we shall, without further parley, put an end to this matter. For, by the mass! I would rather that a whole army were at once let loose upon my dominions, than hold out a quarrel with one of these proud churchmen, who has got the whole Vatican at his back."

"Thou meanest well, good cousin," answered Henry; "and I would fain prevent my kingdom from being placed under an interdict, and myself excommunicated by name. But, be-shrew me, if I will grant any new inroads upon my privileges, or make a concession that in one jot abateth my honour. I will re-instate him in his former dignities—no more will I grant. I tell thee, I can never love him again; my heart hath been too long estranged; and, even now, I would rather tilt a long summer's day with the bravest knight in thy ranks, than smooth my brow for this interview."

“Tut ! tut ! brother of England,” replied Louis, with a smile ; “thou art too violent in thy dislikes ; and wilt, if thou talkest after this manner, cause me to think that our late treaty had scarcely thy heart’s sanction, although it was bound by hand and glove ; which I ever hold more sacred than all the piles of parchment.”

The brow of Henry reddened for a moment, as he replied : “Thou hast never found us approach thee without sound of trumpet, and the voice of herald ; and, were we not to lift our banners now and then, the blood would stagnate in the veins of our warriors. But we can ever heal our differences sooner with the sword, than by calling in the aid of the Church ; and now there is peace between us.”

“I did but jest,” replied Louis ; “but, by all the saints ! I scarcely know whether I love

thee better as a foe or a friend ; for, methinks, some of our meetings, after we have exchanged a few hearty cuffs on either side, have ever been of the pleasantest.”

“ They have ever soonest brought us to a right understanding,” replied Henry, his good humour returning, when he remembered the advantages his arms had gained over France. “ But, yonder comes the Primate ; and thou shalt see that I will so far prevent my feelings from marring this meeting, that I will be the first to welcome his arrival.” So saying, he gave his steed the rein, and rode off to meet Becket.

Exile and long suffering had not in the least abated the Primate’s love of splendour ; for he rode up robed in the rich costume of his office ; while the housings of his beautiful palfrey were emblazoned with mitres and crosses of gold,

and his own mitre shone radiant with jewels. Beside him rode the Archbishop of Sens; his episcopal robes even rivalling those of the Primate; while his short corpulent figure appeared to the greatest disadvantage beside the noble and commanding form of Becket. Behind them came the faithful Gryme, who had been true to his master through a thousand tribulations; and if there was one heart there that panted for peace, like a hunted stag for the water-course, it was that of the honest monk. A long line of priests of all degrees lengthened out the procession; which was enriched by the costly crosses and crosiers which they bore. While the eye glanced from the long line of churchmen to the armed ranks which were ranged on either hand, and contemplated that small band, moving weaponless and fearless along, it was at once struck by the mysterious

power which the religious order possessed, who, with no other shield than their holy profession, dared to enter the lists against a force ; which, if they dared, could in an instant have scattered them like chaff before the wind.

Time and care had furrowed the manly brow of Becket ; although his eyes still retained their former fire, and his tall figure was as erect as when, years ago, he unhorsed one of the bravest knights of France, on the borders of that very river which was rolling along in the distant sunshine. Becket cast down his eyes for a moment when he saw the King approaching, as if he sought to collect his thoughts ; while Henry, without any apparent reserve, took off his rich cap to salute him,—an honour which he had never paid him before.

“ Your Highness will pardon me,” said Becket, “ for wearing my mitre a moment, as

I come on this mission from His Holiness ; but," added he, taking it off and handing it to Gryme, " if I meet as the former friend and servant of my sovereign, I will, as in duty bound, forego all ceremony."

A cloud gathered over Henry's brow for a moment when the Primate began to speak ; but it vanished again ere he had done, and he replied in a most kindly tone : " I would have us meet as we have done heretofore, burying all former grievances, and only endeavouring to make each other recompense after this long and painful absence. Wilt thou ride apart with me for a brief space, that we may converse more freely ?"

They rode together uncovered to the banks of the river. They were alone for the first time, after the absence of nearly six years ; and as they reined their steeds side by side, after a

brief embarrassment they gazed upon each other in silence.

“Becket,” said Henry, in a tone which sounded like the kindness of by-gone years, “why have we thus long been estranged from each other? Why have we not before sought to heal this foolish breach?”

“I know not,” answered Becket, with deep emotion; “but when your Highness refused me an audience at Woodstock, I deemed I had erred beyond all forgiveness; and peradventure pride but increased our quarrel; for I thought you might hold me in contempt if I humbled myself further.”

“I knew not of thy coming until it was too late,” answered Henry in a tone of apparent sincerity; “it was to the interest of such knaves as the Bishop of Hereford to blow the flames which were kindled between us: on mine

honour, I knew it not until long after thy departure from England."

"I have ever held your Highness in high esteem," continued Becket; "and saving the honour of God and the church, would willingly sacrifice my own feelings for your welfare, and the increase of our peace."

"Truce! truce! with thy salvos," said Henry, with much ado preventing himself from breaking forth; "if I put the honour of my kingdom against the rights of the church, we shall never bring this matter to an end. I see," added he, reining his steed a little apart, "that we must yet stand upon the ceremony of our order;—that thou art not willing that we should become the friends we once were, when neither honour, church, nor kingdom, were bars to our friendship."

"Your Highness mistaketh my intent," re-

plied Becket in rather a severer tone ; “ there is nothing I so much covet, as peace between us ; and believe me, it shall be long ere I break it again with thyself.”

“ With myself you might not,” answered the King, still keeping his steed at the same cold distance. “ But I fear we shall but patch up a peace between us, as we do with our Cousin of France ; which is broken we scarce can tell how ; and find ourselves at blows before we have begun an enquiry ; and yet I would not willingly break it.”

“ I have never sought to push my quarrel with your Grace,” continued Becket, compelling himself with pain to proceed, like a foot-beaten traveller who finds himself in the midst of a painful journey, which necessity forces him to pursue ; “ but I have prayed to the saints to forgive you ; even when your anger

was most kindled against me, I sought not to retaliate."

"I owe thee some return for thy forbearance," replied Henry with emotion; "thou wert true to thy pledge, and revealed not my marriage with Rosamond. Cursed be the hand that cut her off," added he, remaining several moments in silence. "Becket," continued he, drawing his steed side by side with the Primate, "I have never set foot in the bowers of Woodstock since her death. It was her last wish that there should be peace between us, and for her sake I will yield thee all thou dost require,—all thy lands, livings, and privileges will I give up, I will withhold nothing from thee. We will again be friends, and thou shalt find me more ready to forgive than thou wilt be to offend."

Henry spoke this with sincerity, for all pride

and ill feeling vanished, while his nature was subdued by the remembrance of Rosamond; and he himself for the moment was unconscious of what then appeared the true state of his heart towards Becket. He spoke under the deepest excitement, and was in that state which only the remembrance of love or death can awaken; and at such moments no human bosom can remain in its true and natural state, no more than when it seeks to cherish anger.

“Heaven bless your Highness!” said Becket, while a tear gathered in his eye, “would that I had never offended so kind a master. I crave no more than you have offered: grant me the kiss of peace, and the past shall be for ever buried.”

“Not now! Not here!” said the King, at once recalled to a consciousness of his true feelings. “It was but a foolish vow which I

made in an angry mood. I will give thee the kiss of peace when we meet in England. Believe me, it is but—— No, I cannot —some other time—— But without it we are again friends,” said he, once more reining his steed apart.

The features of Becket crimsoned; pride brought the blood to his cheek; he felt in a moment that Henry had not entirely forgiven him, for the kiss of peace was in those days like the bread and salt of the Eastern nations, and the omission told that no true friendship reigned in the bosom of him who withheld it. “There is, then, a truce between us,” said Becket, speaking first after a long silence. “I would have sealed it firmer than the hollow armistice your grace holds with France, but”—he again remained silent. Had he but had humbled himself, and implored Henry again to render their peace perfect, the King would have

granted it. The coldness then between them was but the thin frostwork on glass; but neither of them breathed upon it. Pride alone, sheer unbending pride, as much of which lodged in the bosom of the churchman as the monarch's, alone prevented their complete reconciliation. We yet see such things daily in the world; mankind are still the same: those who meet each other with a frown upon the brow, heave a sigh for former friendship when they have passed.

We too often mistake our nature; what we consider the true state of our feelings, is very often only engendered by long habit, merely based on a fancied dislike which may appear real, and we smother those nobler dictates which arise to expel it. It may be years before we arrive at the true state of this feeling; but it as assuredly lives there, as the

seed which buried deep in the earth, has no power to vegetate, until it is brought nearer the surface, and receives the warmth of the sun. True, there may be, and are exceptions to this state ; but even the murderer, after having accomplished his bloody deed, has been known to recal some good trait of his victim after death, and brood over his crime with remorse. Nor would Henry on a future day have spent a long night in tears of penitence at the shrine of Becket, if there had not been some traits in the man's character which he loved. Perhaps the historian has no right to cast such a lenient eye on this event ; but we who seek only for the life and feeling which flows through our ancient annals, and endeavour to trace all motives from their great source, the human heart, are compelled to make allowances, which the stern mind of the true historian has no right to admit.

He must judge of his character, as if he was tried in a formal court ; while we listen to his confession in the silent cell, and even construe kindly that which seems to call loudest for his own condemnation. But it requires a more solid mind than ours, to bring these few simple reasons to proof, although from our very heart do we believe them.

But to return to our story. They rode back again without exchanging a word ; there was a painful silence between them, which both were afraid to break ; like two friends who having exchanged a few angry words, still move on together, each hoping that the other will, before they part, again begin some friendly conversation.

All that the king had promised was acceded to when they returned, and ratified in the presence of the King of France and the

Archbishop of Sens, besides numerous priests and barons. There was then nothing left but for Becket to take his farewell of Henry previous to his departure for England. The monarch was busied in consulting with several knights in the distance, when Louis approached the Archbishop, and enquired if Henry had granted him the kiss of peace.

“He hath not,” answered Becket, ashamed to acknowledge that he had yielded, without obtaining this ceremony; “but hath promised that he will withhold it no longer than while we meet in England.”

“Then be on thy guard,” continued the King, who had been friendly to Becket during his exile, and given him open shelter in spite of the menaces of Henry. “I warn thee, without believing that our cousin of England entertaineth any dishonourable intent; but when he

grants full forgiveness he withholdeth nothing, nay, would give away a province were it needed to seal his solemn pledge."

"It matters not," replied the Primate; "'tis but a form, that perchance would have been all the better fulfilled. But it is time that I was in England, for the garden of God needeth much weeding; it has become like a house which goeth to decay during the owner's absence; and I will, by the help of Christ, bring it back to its former order."

"Better dig and delve about the roots," replied the King of France; "I would not have thee return with the axe in thy hand to cut off every bough which hath run riot during thy exile. Every summer bringeth not fruit to the tree; nor doth the frost always destroy that which looketh dead. To be plain with thee;—widen not the breach which his Holiness

hath with so much difficulty built up. Remember that Henry is but a tamed lion; and may, in a moment of anger, leap back again into his former wildness:—I speak to thee as a brother.—But see! he approaches.”

“Here then we part,” said Becket, looking fixedly at Henry, as if he yet hoped that their separation would not take place without the important salutation; then added, “I fear this is the last time I shall look upon your Highness;—the sea is fraught with perils,—and the hand of Heaven hath marked out the bounds of all our lives.”

“Thou dost not suspect that I have placed dangers in thy path?” said Henry, his conscience taking fire because he had withheld the final ceremony;—then continuing in a milder tone: “Trust me, we shall meet again, and on such terms, that there will need no stinted

forms to seal our friendship: thou shalt not find me behindhand with thee in the offices of good fellowship."

"Other affairs now call for our presence," said Louis turning to Henry; "and as Blanch hath it, I would but see you kiss and depart in peace; then, Cousin of England, we will to horse."

"We have reserved that for our next meeting," replied Henry, the blood mantling his cheek as he spoke; "and—" he paused—looked confused—then seizing the stirrup of Becket's steed, added, "and will act the part of squire to our brother, if he will condescend to accept our shoulder to mount."

Becket replied not; but placing his foot in the stirrup which Henry held, pressed his hand lightly upon his shoulder, and with an agility which showed how little he needed such as-

sistance (nay, almost disdained to embrace it), sprang lightly into the saddle,—waved an adieu to each of the monarchs,—and the procession was again speedily in motion.

So they parted, never to meet again. Once did Becket turn in his saddle to look behind him, and he beheld Henry standing motionless, with folded arms, and eyes rivetted upon him. Had he gone back and sought a last embrace, the King would have won a sincere friend, and the calendar have lost a martyr; but he rode along in silence, and the monarch turned away.

A few more nights saw him rocking on the blue bosom of the deep, as with outspread sail and yielding oars, the galley made for the “pale-faced shores” of England. But he had dispatched the messengers of wrath beforehand, and sent those fatal documents which excommunicated several of the bishops; for he was still the un-

bending Primate, and sought not to humble those who had offended him, by using gentle measures ; but by sending before him the rumbling thunder of the Vatican, as if to announce that the god of the storm was at hand.

CHAPTER VI.

Such a noise arose
As the shrouds make at sea in a stiff tempest ;
As loud, and to as many tunes ; hats, cloaks,
Doublets, I think flew up ; and had their faces
Been loose *that* day, they had been lost ;—such joy
I never saw before.

SHAKSPEARE.

ALTHOUGH the Archbishop landed safely in England, he was not ignorant that many of his former enemies were lying in wait for him ; for the sentences of excommunication had been delivered before his arrival, against the Archbishop of York, and the Bishops of London and Salisbury ; and many of their friends had bestirred themselves to prevent his coming ashore at Dover. Becket, however, was ap-

prized of their intentions, and landed at Sandwich ; and no sooner was his arrival blown abroad, than thousands assembled from all quarters to welcome him ;—their numbers still increasing as he drew nearer to Canterbury. But few of the wealthy and influential, however, mingled in that dense procession, which was chiefly formed of the Saxon serfs, and those who were either disaffected to the Norman government, or looked upon Becket as a man who had suffered persecution for the sake of religion. But their numbers were great, and stretched as far as the eye could reach ; and as it had already been rumoured abroad that the Primate's enemies were waiting for him, this motley assembly had snatched up such arms as chance threw in their way, and rushed along with all the confusion of a mob bent upon mischief.

Numbers of them were armed with scythes, spades, pitchforks, and every implement of husbandry which they could seize upon ; while many tore up the fences, and moved along shouting and brandishing hedge-stakes, palings, and huge boughs which they had broken from the neighbouring trees.—Bond and free,—all jostled together ;—now crowding around the Archbishop to receive his blessing ; then again hurrying along with loud huzzas which sounded far and wide over the distant valleys. Becket was mounted on a beautiful steed, which pranced proudly along, as if conscious that it bore the burthen on which all eyes were rivetted ; and had it not been for the excellent horsemanship of the Primate, many a poor Saxon would have been trampled under his hoofs as they endeavoured to touch the noble animal. Beside Becket rode John of Oxford,—a prelate

in high favour with Henry, and sent as a safe-conduct by the monarch with the Primate;—behind them came the faithful Gryme, who was followed by several other monks of his order.

The procession had by this time gained a picturesque turning of the road; by the side of which opened another path: its entrance was occupied by a party of horsemen. The foremost part of the mob passed on without regarding the group; but no sooner did Becket ride up, than two of the foremost horsemen rode out, and drew up their reins before him, as if to oppose his further progress. They were backed up by their companions, and the whole of them, hemmed in by the mob,—whose shouts of “Cut down the enemies of Christ!” “hew to pieces the limbs of the traitors!” etc.—pre-

vented the words of the foremost rider from being heard.

“Silence!” exclaimed the Archbishop; “hold your peace, I pray you, that we may hear and reply to these people.—Ranulph de Broc,” continued he, addressing the horseman who had thus suddenly confronted him; “what is thy will with me? or why hast thou dared to impede my progress?”

“Why hast thou excommunicated the bishops? enquired the knight, undaunted by the menaces of the mob; “and art marching through the land with these rebellious serfs around thee, withdrawing them from the labour and lash to which they were born? and—”

“Peace! peace! in the name of Heaven, I charge ye!” exclaimed Becket with a loud voice; for a deep murmur, as of a gathering storm, rose among the multitude, and had it not

been for the interference of the Primate, the small handful of horsemen, with De Broc at their head, would have been torn into a thousand pieces. “Art thou not afraid?” proceeded the Primate addressing the knight, “that I should hurl the thunders of the Church against thine own head, and those of thy followers, for thus daring to interrogate thy superior, who is accountable to none, saving God, and his Holiness the Pope, by whose sanction those enemies to Christ were excommunicated?”

“Thou hast entered the kingdom with fire and sword,” replied De Broc, compelled in some measure to restrain his wrath before such a formidable assembly. “But if thou thinkest thus to over-run the land, and expectest to find the friends of those, against whom thy malice is directed, asleep, thou wilt speedily know with whom thou hast to deal.”

“ And I,” said the Sheriff of Kent, “ shall send a messenger to France, to apprize his Highness that you are stirring up all the serfs and villeins of the land to rebellion.—You,” added he with a sneer, “ a man of no ancestry, are seeking to overthrow the power of the Norman nobles,—men of name and fame,—in whose veins run knightly blood.”

“ Peace ! on your souls peace !” said Becket, putting back the points of the weapons, scores of which were now turned towards the Sheriff and De Broc. “ Peace an’ ye are faithful children of the Church,” added he, the blood mounting his cheek at the thought of being thus taunted with his birth ; and raising his voice when he had appeased the murmurs of the mob, he said,—“ And what better blood runs in thy veins, Sir Sheriff, than in that of the meanest churls, who by a few favourable thrusts of the

sword, might be elevated to the rank of the proudest knight among you. Slaves !” continued he, his eyes blazing with all their former ardour, “ I scorn ye all ! ye are but paltry wretches who would have gone down to your graves unnoticed, had it not been for the fortune which favoured your ancestors. You have a name,” added he rising in his stirrups as he spoke, “ which is not your own ; while mine springs from my own actions, and not from the deeds of the dead. I have made myself a nobility such as the proudest of you can never attain. I’d rather be a porter at the gate,” added he, his haughty lip curling with unutterable scorn, “ one who shares his meals with the dog that barks beside the threshold,—a serf that feeds on acorns, and lives by the sweat of his brow, and the labour of his own strong arm ; than such miserable sycophants as ye are,—

wretches who only feed by virtue of those who lie in their graves,—mere echoes in the chambers of death,—slaves who live on the dead. Ride on,” added he, motioning with his arm for the cavalcade to proceed, “lest by breathing the air of these living sepulchres, I become infected. Forward, but on your souls injure them not.”

It will be readily conceived how such a speech, so much in accordance with the feelings of that vast multitude, was listened to ; but it is beyond all power to describe the loud burst of applause which broke forth when he had ceased speaking ; and the thousand mad expressions of triumph which they assumed. It was loud as the shouting raised by an immense army, when the enemy is first perceived flying before them, and, when those who are near at hand have ceased their loud huzzas, the air

still rings with shoutings afar off, as the sound is taken up by those stationed on the farthest hill and remotest valley. So rose one deep, deafening peal, when Becket's voice became mute, which was caught up and echoed back a mile away ; while the waving of their rude, but warlike weapons, and the grim triumph which settled on a thousand wild features, around the Primate, told how dangerous it would be to molest a man, in whose cause were enlisted so many desperate followers. The attendants of Ranulph de Broc and the Sheriff began to feel for the weapons which they had secreted under their tunics ; for they deemed it not prudent to display them before such a multitude ; and the hand of the Sheriff was already upon the hilt of his dagger, as if he meditated violence, though at the immediate risk of his own life. Ranulph de Broc saw his design ; and, seizing

his arm, said : “ Cast not thyself into the jaws of these dogs. We will dispatch a messenger to Henry’s court. Fitzurse and De Tracy have still their followers ; nor will De Morville’s sword linger an instant longer in its sheath, after the excommunicated Bishops have laid their grievances at Henry’s feet. Trust me, we will yet gratify our revenge.” Saying which, the cavalcade departed, amid the loud hissing and hooting of the mob, one of whom threw a huge stone, which struck De Broc’s helmet. The knight instantly turned round his steed, drew the sword from beneath the tunic which covered his armour, and clove the offender to the very teeth ; then, striking the spurs into the flanks of his war-horse, joined his companions, who now thought it high time to set off at full gallop.

It was well for them that they thus escaped ;

for hundreds of the crowd had now rushed forth to revenge the death of their comrade ; and had it not been for the commands of Becket, they would have given the enemy chase ; but the Prelate ordered them to fall back ; and not one refused to obey him. The dead and bleeding body was, however, taken up, and borne along by four stout-limbed serfs, in the front of the procession ; and many an aged head, which was thrust out of the little door-ways, when they reached the streets of Canterbury, shook, as they beheld this evil omen.

“ The Holy Virgin protect him ! ” said one old woman, uplifting her skinny hands, and speaking to another old crone, whose brow bore the wrinkles of eighty winters ; “ he looks as smiling as when he set out from Oxford to meet the King of Scotland at Lincoln. A

rare day was that, Joan ; just such a sounding of trumpets, and ringing of bells, and shouting, as there is even now. Ah ! marry," added she, shaking her head, and heaving a sigh, "such a sight can but be once seen. Would that these Normans were like him !"

"It bodes no good," said Joan, moving her head to and fro as she spoke, and accompanying her speech with a waving of her wrinkled hand. "It bodes no good, dame Rook, to see his way marked out with blood. Did you but see how his black horse set its foot wherever the red drops had fallen? And before our own door, where the crowd had to bend to let the wain and oxen pass ; even when they had gone by, and the Archbishop might have kept a straight course, the steed put his nose to the ground ; and, like a slot-hound, still followed the track of blood. It bodes no good,

I fear, dame Rook," added she, shaking her head, until her gray hairs fell loose from the hood. "I have heard my mother Maud say, that when Harold, the son of Godwin, passed on his way to meet William the Bastard, at Hastings, the bleeding body of Hadrada was borne foremost in the procession; and Harold, you wot well, went to his death. It bodes no good."

"But Harold swore a solemn oath on the bodies and relics of the Saints, that the bastard should be king after the death of Edward," replied dame Rook, "and he kept not his pledge. I have heard Bertha of Bayeux tell, how that her grandfather was in the hall when the son of Godwin took the oath, and that he trembled and became pale as the dead, when the cloth was withdrawn, and displayed the holy relics. No, Harold fell in the field of

Hastings, for breaking his vow. It was the judgment of God."

"Tell me not of that," replied Joan; "Harold was in the midst of feasting and revelry when tidings came that the invader had set his cursed feet in these realms, and he rushed into the fight, making sure of the victory. So returneth this Archbishop, looking as high and haughty as if he was even above his Holiness the Pope, and had come to trample upon all his enemies. It bodes no good, dame Rook, to see him return to his flock after so long an absence, more like a conqueror, than one who should mourn for the havoc the enemy hath made in the fold during his absence. Good old Theobald, who was Archbishop before him, aye, an' would listen to the confession of the lowliest handmaiden that ever numbered her beads,—never held his head so high and haughty

as this Thomas à Becket. Humility, dame Rook, sits not so erect as he did to-day in his saddle; and there is not room for many holy thoughts, when a man is bowing before every white favour, and casting smiles on every fair face."

"Out upon thee, Joan!" said dame Rook: "wouldst thou have him look upon us after so long an absence, as if he took no pleasure in the meeting; or bring a countenance as gloomy as a maid's returning from confession, who is doomed to some heavy penance? When didst thou ever see a proud Norman bend his body and wave his hand as the Archbishop did to us but now?"

"Nay, dame Rook," replied Joan, "his eye was directed to thy pretty niece at the lattice above. Holy man, though he may be, yet trust me, he threw not his smiles upon such furrowed

faces as ours; it was Edith's smooth cheek and blue eye that drew down the salute. An' she were akin to me I would make her draw the folds of her tunic a little closer, she is over fond of showing her white neck through the lattice whenever there is a crowd in the street. And the eyes of these monks are ever more ready to gaze on a slip of a beauty, than on their breviaries ;—look to her, dame Rook."

But dame Rook only answered to these friendly admonitions in a tone of ill nature, which caused Joan to draw in her aged head, and slam to the old rickety door, which, when closed had crannies enow in it to admit all the winds of Heaven, and a good-sized hand would have found no difficulty to have thrust itself in between the door-post and the hinges. Dame Rook also retreated to vent her spleen on her niece Edith, and make her run in an extra-lace

through the top of her tunic, that it might be drawn closer when next she ventured abroad.

Meantime the unexpected approach of Becket had caused no little stir among the monks of the Cathedral, for, much like schoolboys in the absence of their master, these holy men had set no limits to their indulgences, well aware of the strict discipline they must undergo on his arrival.

“Is all cleared?” said father Philip, wiping his lips as he spoke, for he had but just drained the leathern bottle of its last mouthful: “Look round, brother Luke,—the shouts draw nearer,—let nothing be out of order, nor aught remaining to tell that we have been making merry. What doeth that cup there? let it be cleansed instantly, lest it smell of wine. Quick, brother, or reach it me, and thou hast no water at hand. Nay, stand not there confused, needs

must when —— thou knowest the rest : e'en dip it in the Holy water and wipe it on thy stole, while I get rid of these bones, which I must thrust among the relics of the saints. Marry ! they will be sweeter to kiss than the mouldy ribs of the blessed St. Dunstan ; and should any pilgrim say that they have a smell of roasting about them,—why, remember to tell him that he was burnt to the very bones while struggling with Sathanas, and it will the more increase his marvel."

" I must hasten, brother Philip," said Luke, " to put on my hair shirt, which, I fear, it will be difficult to draw over my ears, the rats have eaten so many holes through it. As to this hoarseness in my throat, which, I fear, hath come on through lingering so late to hear the Reeve's wife's confessions—for the jade would never enumerate her sins until the good man had

gone to rest — I know not what answer to make the Archbishop, an' he inquireth of me."

"Trouble not thy head about these trifles, brother Luke," said his holy colleague; "an' thou hast got enough of the hair shirt left to go round thy neck, and be seen above thy frock, thou canst easily twist thy body about, as if thou hadst the whole of it on; and those who see thy wry faces, will attribute them to the pain. As to thy hoarseness, thou canst say it was brought on by long chauntings, and continued prayers, for his safe return. And should he inquire after the grease in thy cowl, which hath held many a dainty morsel of late, thou canst say thou didst wear it before thee, to dry up thy tears, while weeping for his absence."

"But, holy brother, will it not smell too strongly of bacon?" inquired Luke.

"St. Augustine speaketh of salt tears," re-

plied brother Philip ; “and the garments we have preserved of the blessed Dunstan retain an ill fragrance, like bacon which hath been long kept : should he remark the redness of thine eyes, through emptying too many cups of late ; that also ariseth from weeping ; nay, thy very corpulency must spring from fasting ; for, what saith St. Augustine : ‘ while I were from you, ye fed upon the wind, and grew great beneath your emptiness.’ ”

“ Brother,” said Luke, “ I would fain confess to thee, before the Primate arriveth, that thou mayest absolve me ; for many of my sins have been committed under thy sanction, and some of them thou hast been a partaker of.”

“ Be brief, then, good brother,” said Philip, “and remember that thou needest not to sum up every trifle, like a maiden who recounteth her dreams, and telleth what thoughts passed

through her mind, while repeating her aves."

"I have brought away the last capon of widow Wolfbarns," continued Luke, "and not a mass have we yet offered up for the soul of her husband, although I swore that he was safe out of purgatory."

"If she hath no more," replied Father Philip, "there is no hope for his soul. Proceed."

"When in my cups, holy brother," continued Luke, "I lost the sole of the shoe of the blessed St. Dunstan, and showed one of my own when I went round to collect eggs and cheese for the use of our brethren. Nay, allowed the good-wives to kiss it, as if it had belonged to the Holy Saint himself; and, when I replaced it in the blessed box, many of them said, that they felt their souls comforted."

"That is no crime, good brother," answered

Philip; "the real sole itself Rufus gave in exchange, years ago, for a runlet of wine, and substituted one of his own in its stead. The blessed box in which it was preserved giveth the same virtue to whatever it encloses. Neither is the box the same; for it was sold to a pilgrim: but the new one was put in the place where it stood; and the crypt still retains sanctity enough to give virtue to a dozen.

"But that is not all," continued he, whispering in the other's ear; then adding: "but absolution was given before quitting the cell; and I underwent my own penance, tasting of no more meat until the sun went down."

"I also have erred on the same grounds, brother Luke," replied Philip, with a sigh; "therefore, is our sin divided. Even the Jews would take out a sheep that had fallen into the pit on the Sabbath. We are sheep, good

brother, and fell not on that day. Hast thou aught more to confess ?”

“ Yea, my brother,” continued Luke ; “ I have heard of the temptations which have beset our Pardoner, and have fallen into the very error of the ways which he shunned : but I thought that, like him, I might resist them ; and but sought them out, to see how I could endure the trial.”

“ There thou didst unwisely,” replied Philip, “ but, for thy penance, I adjudge thee to bring the half-picked capon and the stoup of wine, to my cell ; and that thou partakest of none of these things until the morrow. I will undergo the mortification of eating them, for the love I bear thee ; although to-night is appointed to be kept as a solemn fast.”

“ But there is also the remains of a huge pasty,” said Luke ; “ had I not better bear a

portion of thy penance, that we may the more speedily betake ourselves to our prayers ?”

“ Even as thou wilt,” replied Philip ; and, if thou hast any one thou canst send, warn Blanche, the Blacksmith’s wife, not to come to confession until moon-rise ; and bid her be sure to enter by the Southern postern.”

So parted these holy men, practising the anthem which they were to chaunt on the Archbishop’s arrival, and which required some skill, as they had been trolling a merry stave the night before, and “ *O Crux ave Spes unica,*” mingled strangely with “ Then drink enow cups to outnumber your beads.” Such was, in too many instances, the state of the Church, which Becket endeavoured to reform ; and were the mask to be torn away from the faces of many a demure hypocrite in the present day, there would still be found such men as brother Luke

and father Philip. Let those who think that our picture is overdone, turn to the pages of Chaucer, who wrote a century and a half later than the period we have here taken up, and they will there see the strong colours in which this true old English poet, dared to portray the vices of the monks of his day. Were the veil but withdrawn by some daring hand in our own times, the picture would be found nearly the same ; for the cloak of religion, like that of charity, is too often worn only “to cover a multitude of sins ;” although we entertain no doubt but that there are thousands of exceptions to this evil rule. We live in an age which has accustomed itself to call vice by gentle names ; —it is even considered rude to use the strong expressive phrases of our ancestors to polite ears ; although the meaning is just as well understood ; and he who says, “ Really I could

scarcely have believed it from any other person," but goes a round-about way of saying, "Sir, you're a liar."

But to return to our narrative. The procession, which had by this time become considerably augmented by the hundreds who waited to welcome Becket at the gates of Canterbury, now halted before the wide doors of the cathedral, which were thrown open on the occasion, and the Primate, preceded by Gryme, bearing the cross, entered between the long line of monks who were drawn up to receive him, Luke and Father Philip making by far the lowest genuflection. The eye of the Archbishop kindled, as it wandered over the vaulted dome, or gazed upon the familiar shrines, and while the loud chaunt arose, and echoed through the pillared aisles, his lips were seen to move as if in prayer. He ascended the steps of the holy

altar of St. Bennet, and waving his hand to silence the deep hum of the multitude, who now filled the body of the church, he thus addressed them :—" Brethren, I am once more in the midst of you in safety. It hath pleased Heaven to rescue me from a thousand dangers ; and I shall still be preserved until my appointed time. But I have come to die amongst you ;— even as the finger points to the dial, so is the hour of my death marked, and is now near at hand. As I have stood, so will I still remain, firm and fearless in upholding the dignity of the Church of Christ, until I perish beneath the burthen."

He then proceeded to pronounce sentence of excommunication against Ranulph de Broc, and Gervas de Cornhill the Sheriff of Kent, adding, in the bitterness of his spirit, " May they never find peace until they have humbled themselves

at the foot of the altar.—May their eyes never obtain rest. May their lands bring forth thistles, and their homes fall into desolation, and every wind of Heaven blow upon them unkindly. May their thoughts be unto them a torment. As for my own life,” continued he, after using many terms of unmeasured severity against his persecutors, “I only hold it in tenure of Heaven ; and when it is needed, I will resign it for the service of Christ. The church hath need of some one to fight her battles, and I am not one to look upon the struggle without striking a blow ; for when called upon I am prepared to die.”

So he proceeded :—his ancient military spirit bursting forth, and consuming all his better feelings ; for his proud soul could find no rest until he had humbled all his enemies ; and in his zeal for the dignity of the church, he forgot that

holy adage which says : “blessed are the peacemakers.” But the crowd soon dispersed ; and the man who that night, in the streets of Canterbury, dared to assert that there breathed a holier, or a better, man than Thomas à Becket, stood need to have had his scull cased in triple mail.

CHAPTER VII.

My blood hath been too cold, and temperate,
Unapt to stir at these indignities,
And you have found me; for accordingly,
You tread upon my patience: but be sure
I will from henceforth rather be myself
Mighty and to be feared.

I am burnt up with inflaming wrath;
A rage, whose heat hath this condition,
That nothing can allay, nothing but blood.

SHAKESPEARE.

OUR readers would feel but little interest in the narrative, were we to follow the progress of the Archbishop of Canterbury through all his numerous processions, or dwell upon the sensation his presence awakened wherever he appeared; to every reader of English history these are matters well known. Our story then carries us to Bares in Normandy, where King

Henry was keeping his Christmas, quite unconscious of those new outbreaks of the Primate's vengeance. Many of the Norman Barons who sat at the table on the evening in which we again resume our tale, remarked that the King had never appeared more cheerful; he seemed, indeed, to have regained the buoyant spirit of former years. The festive scene varied but little from that which we have described in a former volume, in which men in armour, and gold and silver drinking vessels threw back the light from the suspended lamps in a huge banquet hall of the oldest Norman architecture. The King occupied the seat of honour on the dais, and around him sat many of his favourites, among whom were Reginald Fitzurse, Hugh de Merville, Tracy, and Brito, all bitter enemies of Becket's; their conversation had turned upon a variety of matters, none of much import,

and the wine cup had also circulated freely, and all either were, or pretended to be, in excellent spirits.

“Thou art in a merry mood to-night, De Corbel,” said Henry, addressing one of his peers, whose jokes had before created much laughter among the barons; for these nobles made no scruple at jesting with religion over their wine cups:—“Thou art in a merry mood, but how thou canst prove that the saints sit laughing at the follies of us poor mortals surpasseth my understanding.”

“Nay! by the mass! I will make the matter clear to your Highness,” answered De Corbel, “and prove that no good Saint who attends to all the requests that are made, can look over his business with a staid countenance. Here comes the governor of a besieged castle vowing to offer up a candle half as long as his lance if

the Saint will but protect the fortress. Without are the besiegers, imploring victory at the same time, and vowing half the spoils of the castle, if they are but permitted to cut every throat within the walls. Then comes the bishop praying devoutly for the welfare of his church, and his own preservation ; but before he has done, the saint is promised the spoils of an hundred pilgrims, if he will but remove the bishop to another world, and re-instate the other pious petitioner in his stead. Some old man who has seen eighty summers, prays that he may be blest with an heir before his death ; while his young wife is also forwarding his petition, by craving the safe return of her gallant, for whose long absence she has grown uneasy : so that between them the prayer may be answered. Even the thief has his vow to offer up, and swears that if he is but allowed to knock out

the brains of the traveller in safety, the saint shall go shares in his booty. One bawleth aloud for rain, and another implores the saint for fair weather until his seed is sown. Then cometh the mariner praying for a south wind to waft him into the distant haven; while another is sailing to the north, and vows a barrel of stock-fish to some monastery, if the saint will but continue the gale until his voyage is ended,—and ten to one even then he will cheat his patron, by offering those which have been exposed to the sea, and are mouldy as the relics kept at some shrine which is scarcely visited by a pilgrim in a year.”

“Methinks the business of a saint savoureth somewhat of our own,” replied Henry; “and amid so many contending parties he will do well to leave them now and then to shift for themselves. What sayest thou Glanvil?”

“That I should not covet so many opposite causes in one court,” answered the great law-giver, “as neither saint nor sinner could satisfy all without giving the Devil half the fees, and making Justice deaf as well as blind.”

“Why did the Romans put a balance in the jade’s hands?” inquired another knight.

“Put that question to the Usurer,” answered De Corbel, “and he will show you his own scales, and decide for him who can plump down the beam with the heaviest interest. So doth his Holiness, with reverence be it spoken, by blessing with his tongue, and signing the cross with his finger, and also cursing with the same airy weapons, continue to keep in subjection the world, the flesh, and the devil; making kings enforce his laws, soldiers fight his battles, and husbandmen gather for him the fruits of

the earth ;—thus putting out his sanctity on the highest security.”

“ I look upon him,” said the brutal Fitzurse, who was of no religion ; “ as the largest dealer in damnation, seeing that he hath so many emissaries who buy up all crimes, and hunt after every secret wickedness, making it their business to find out where sin has the largest consumption, and taking it in exchange for pardons, absolutions, and penances, which they manufacture on the spot ; neither can any crime be committed too high for their purchase ; as they have store-rooms for murder, adultery, theft, and every other evil, which they take to their own cells in exchange for their creed.”

“ Methinks, if our grave primate were here,” said Henry, “ he would put a freezing check upon your mirth ; though, by the way, there was

a time when he would have run at the ring with the boldest of you."

"He cared not then," said Fitzurse, "when the gates were thrown open, if the city itself escaped, as he had no charge of the wealth within its walls. But what groom would leap his own horse over the same fence that he would his master's. The priest who adviseth the layman to drink a gallon of holy water every night to drive away all dreams of the devil, would, I dare be sworn, have been content himself with a more moderate draught."

"Those who make laws," said Glanvil, "expect not to be tried by them, and yet I know not by what right they should be favoured when once found guilty of offending."

"But thou forgettest, my grave friend," replied the King, "that there are——" he was interrupted by an attendant, to whom he replied,

“admit them instantly;” then muttered to himself, “York, London, and Sarum;—what meaneth this?” All eyes were instantly turned upon the three prelates who now entered the hall, the Archbishop of York leading the way. Henry beckoned him to approach the dais; and, with a changed countenance, enquired: “What ill news have ye brought me? What — what hath brought ye from England?” Henry averted his head when he had put the question; for he saw at a glance that they were the bearers of evil tidings.”

“The Primate hath driven us from England, my liege,” said the Archbishop of York.

“He had scarcely set foot within the kingdom, before we were excommunicated or suspended,” continued the Bishop of London.

“He carrieth fire and sword through the land; and marcheth through every town with

an armed rabble at his heels," added the Bishop of Salisbury.

"Goeth prowling about the fortresses, and endeavoureth to get his armed ruffians within the walls," resumed York.

"Entered Canterbury with the bleeding bodies of his enemies borne before him," echoed London.

"And vowed that he would not rest until he had so trampled upon the blood of all who had opposed him," chimed in Salisbury, speaking from report.

"Nay, more; he even—" again began the Archbishop of York. But he was checked by Henry, who, springing up from his seat, exclaimed, in a voice of thunder: "Peace! peace! drive me not mad!"

It is almost impossible to convey to the reader a true picture of the scene up to the

time that the monarch sprung from his seat; the eagerness with which the ears of the barons drank in these rumours, the looks they exchanged with each other; but, above all, the countenance of the King. As the bishops proceeded, he turned from one to the other like a lion at bay, as if he had made up his mind to escape, by bursting through all that surrounded him, but was at a loss for the moment at what point to make the first rush. As one after another took up the complaint, his fierce eyes went from face to face, until they assumed that blazing fierceness which was so terrible to look upon; and that deep crimson hue glowed on his countenance, which gave him so much the looks of a lion, whose deep roaring was about to make every beast of the forest tremble. But when he had lashed himself into the very height of his anger and sprang up, (overturning De Cor-

bel and Glanvil as he arose,) and bellowed forth, "Drive me not mad,"—he placed both his hands on the upper folds of his rich tunic, ground his teeth together, stamped with his foot upon the earth, ripped the costly garment from his shoulders, tore off his belt and trampled upon it; seized a handful of rushes from the floor, threw them over his head, gnawed them between his teeth,—and acted the part of a raving madman.

Almost unconscious of what he uttered, he at length exclaimed, as he turned upon the barons in the fury of his agony,—“And this from one who hath fed out of my hand, a beggar whom I raised from the earth,—a fellow who came to my court upon a lame horse, now tramples upon my very heart!—now seeks to tear the kingdom from my grasp. And ye,” added he, his eyes flaming as he gazed along

the long lines of his guests; "cowards, whom I nourish daily at my table, not one of ye have courage enough to deliver me from this turbulent priest." He could say no more, his fierce passion had overpowered him, and he would have fallen upon the floor of the hall, had he not been caught by the bishops.

It was one of those fierce outbursts to which he was too often subject, and which were too terrible to last long, but which while raging tears on like an avalanche, that bears down all before it. He was, however, borne to his chamber by the attendants, and, after the lapse of an hour, he had so far recovered himself as to send for the Archbishop of York.

"Canst thou advise with me," said Henry, in a voice which had then more of sorrow than anger in its tones, "or suggest aught that we may put in force to humble this rebellious

Primate, without calling down the wrath of Rome ?”

“ I know not what can be done, my liege,” replied the Archbishop, with a sigh, “ but I fear that the kingdom will have no peace while he is alive.”

“ Traitor ! thou wouldst not urge me to put him to death ?” said Henry, the spark again kindling. “ No ! no !” added he, pressing his hand to his brow, and speaking again in a melancholy voice ; “ his own ingratitude may kill me, but I will never sanction his death.”

“ I intended not that his life should be sacrificed, my liege,” answered the Archbishop ; “ but spoke of it as a hopeless matter to look for England’s tranquillity, until it shall either please Heaven to remove him, or the Pope to divest him of his high power.”

“ Alas ! I know not what to do !” said

Henry, after a long pause ; “ I would give the world for my old peace of mind. I am like a man who keeps himself awake by watching for sleep : I look around for rest ; but nowhere can it be found. Had this last blow come from any other than him, I could have forgiven it ; but were I to throw myself upon my knees before him, he would still be unsatisfied until I had fallen lower.” He buried his face in his hands, and remained several moments in painful silence.

“ All may yet be well,” said the Archbishop, “ his Holiness can no longer shelter him, under the shield of the Church, while he proceedeth in this rebellious manner.”

“ How have I deserved this treatment at his hands ?” continued Henry in the same sorrowful tone : “ I who raised him to the highest rank in my realm, honoured him as my friend instead

of servant, turned a deaf ear to all complaints, —even bowed my back that he might climb the more easily into my favour, and raised him on my own shoulders above all envy,—how am I rewarded?”

“Most true it is, my liege,” answered the Archbishop, “and you have at last had proofs that he was undeserving of all these favours. Would that our breasts were like a glass, that your Highness might see that all we then suggested was but for your own honour, and not those interests which it was believed we sought only for ourselves.”

Well was it for the Archbishop that this was not the case; for if in the heart could have been seen the source and spring of all human actions that of the prelate’s would have been loathly to look upon. It was even worse than hell itself; for although the latter is filled with all

evils, yet penitence reaches the dark abode ; but in the bosom of the Archbishop there lurked not even this least of all good qualities. Henry replied not to his affected sympathy, but summoning an attendant into the apartment, bade him usher Reginald Fitzurse into the chamber. The menial returned and announced that the knight had left the hall some time.

“ Bid Hugh de Morville speed hither, then,” said Henry ; “ strange that Fitzurse should have departed without our permission.”

“ De Morville is also absent, an’ it please your Highness,” said the attendant, “ together with the knights, Tracy, and Brito. But whither they have gone, no one within the hall knoweth.”

“ Perchance some sudden alarm hath summoned them to the coast,” said the King, harbouring no suspicion of the real cause of

their absence; “and seeing that we were ill at ease, they ventured not to break in upon us. No matter,” added he, “bid them be with us at the dawn.”

He waved good night to the Archbishop, and without unrobing, threw himself upon the couch. But vain were his endeavours to sleep. His mind run over all the incidents of past years, and at every turning of his memory stood the form of Thomas à Becket. Sometimes the face seemed to soften down, until it assumed the features of Rosamond, then it changed to the countenance of Queen Eleanor; but the form of the Primate was ever there. The King turned his eyes to the roof of the chamber,—the lamp was expiring; but amid the flickering light that played above his head, his heated fancy still traced the features of Becket :—sometimes they lessened to the size of his hand, then

were displayed broad and clear as the moon when the face of heaven is without a cloud. At length he fell asleep; but even in his slumber he found no rest; his uneasy spirit was tossed up and down like a ship on the bosom of the deep. That night the poorest serf, who groaned under the hand of the heaviest taskmaster, slept sounder than Henry of England.

CHAPTER VIII.

With that they gave their able horses head,
And bending forward, struck their armed heels
Against the panting sides of the poor jades,
Up to the rowel heads, and starting so,
They seemed in running to devour the way,
Staying no longer question.

SHAKSPEARE.

“AN angry man,” says an old writer, “seeth nothing clearly; and he whose judgment is blinded by passion, gropeth his way in the dark.” The truth of this excellent adage King Henry lived to prove, and the proof of it embittered the remainder of his life. Had he but have kept possession of himself, he would at once have read that there was danger in the eye of Reginald Fitzurse; that the shrug of the

shoulder and lowering of the brow of Hugh de Morville boded evil, and the clenched teeth and down-cast silence of De Tracy was but a brooding over revenge ; while Brito, to make plain his meaning, half drew the dagger from its sheath. But Henry saw none of these,—he beheld them not bend low their heads and speak to each other in deep whispers, nay, he was unconscious that he had upbraided his barons with cowardice ; he was “an angry man, and saw nothing clearly.” But scarcely had Henry quitted the hall, before Fitzurse arose from the banquet ; he was speedily followed by De Morville ; Tracy and Brito met them at an appointed place :—the night was dark, but the wind blew fair for the shores of England.

One after another did the knights spur to the appointed place, each taking a separate path to avoid suspicion. Many a passenger halted on

the road to listen to the furious tramping of their steeds in the darkness, when the distance no longer showed the sparks of fire, which their hoofs struck upon the pathway. They met together in the shadow of a rock by the sea-shore, where there was no sound but the heavy panting of their steeds, and the deep roaring of the breakers. Each horseman alighted, and stood with the reins of his steed thrown over his arm, and waited for several moments in silence. Reginald Fitzurse was the first to speak.

“If there is one amongst you,” said he, his voice half buried by the sound of the waves, and scarcely reaching beyond the ears of his companions,—“who feeleth his heart to falter, let him return ere it is too late. All we require of him being his knightly word to keep our mission a secret.”

All expressed their determination to proceed, befall what might.

“Let every man, then, draw his sword,” continued the baron, “and swear upon it that if the Primate refuseth to recall the sentences of excommunication which he hath issued against our friends, all and each of us shall do our devoir to deprive him of his life. That neither time nor place shall prevent us from shedding his blood, and that every one of us shall strike a blow to hasten his death. Swear!”

They crossed their swords over each other, and when Reginald Fitzurse again repeated the sentence, each knight swore,—“So may it befall us if we keep not our oath, and may we find no mercy in the day of doom.”

“Forward then,” said Fitzurse; “the very vessel which brought over the bishops lieth near at hand, and before another sunset her prow

shall graze the shores of England,—the wind bloweth fair for our revenge.”

They rode a little way along the coast, and halted where the sail of a Norman galley glanced through the darkness. A few words from Fitzurse served to explain that their business was urgent, and concerned the King, and the mariners were speedily in motion. Their steeds were safely placed in the hold, the splash of the oars was heard, the huge sail bellied itself before the wind,—and the carved dragon which ornamented the prow of the galley, now turned its scaly head to the broad ocean, and shot through the rolling waves.

A man with a horn in his hand was stationed at the head of the vessel; this he blew in case of danger. One broad sail was all they bore, and when the wind abated the mariners betook themselves to their oars, for navigation had

made but little progress since the Norman invasion. The galley rode like a sea-bird upon the billows, now swinging for a moment upon the summit of a surge, then dipping again into the deep trough of the sea, while the green billows broke over the gilded and scaly neck of the dragon, and the sea-foam hung on the shields of the knights, which were reared by the side of the ship. Before morning, the sky had changed; and the cold deep blue from which the stars shone so clearly was overcast, and huge masses of clouds loomed darkly to windward. The ocean towards the east also became overclouded, and the dull grey light of morning broke forth, dashing over the yeasty waves; for both sea and sky seemed to wear the same gloomy hue. Still the galley staggered bravely along her billowy pathway, and although the wind rung

like a shrill whistle through the shrouds, and bellied the broad sail until it cracked again, as if it fain would bear away the vessel from the fury of the waves, yet by the noon of next day they came in sight of the "pale-faced shore," and landed safely at Dover.

They halted not to refresh themselves, for no sooner were their steeds landed, than they again sprang into their saddles, nor once drew in the rein until they reached Saltwood, which was but a short distance from Canterbury. Here dwelt Ranulph de Broc, who took so active a part at the landing of Becket, and had since rendered himself more obnoxious to the Primate by maiming one of his sumpter horses.

"What brings ye hither in such haste?" said De Broc, as they alighted within the court-yard of the castle.

"Revenge!" muttered Fitzurse, slackening

the girths of his steed ; “ or we have come to redeem our honour, if thou wilt. The King hath upbraided us with cowardice for allowing this cursed Primate so long to disturb his peace. So we deemed it high time to bestir ourselves.”

“ An that be your intent,” said De Broc ; “ I will e’en stir up more forces ; for, trust me, it will need some caution in approaching the lair of this wolf, for he stands high in the opinions of the multitude. But what say ye, have ye the King’s consent to dispatch him ?”

“ Have I not told thee,” replied Fitzurse, sternly, “ that Henry said we were cowards, or we should ere this, have given the turbulent priest his quietus. True, he was an angered when he spoke thus, but his wish, joined with what had long been our own, and we gave him not time to cool. Either this proud Churchman

shall recal his curses, or another sun shall set upon his bleeding corse."

"Nay, I am one of those against whom his anathemas have been thundered," said De Broc; "though the devil a wink have I slept the less for it. There are also several others who groan under the same yoke, and if we will but abide until the morrow, I doubt not but that I shall be able to raise such a force, as will keep the whole mob of Canterbury in awe."

"It were wisdom," said Hugh de Morville, "to wait until then, for the day is fast declining, and I would fain so begin this work, that we may be able to accomplish it before tidings reach us from the King."

"It is wisely said," added De Tracy, "and would but be folly to proceed without a sufficient power to quell the adherents of Becket;

for, trust me, we shall find him no cur that flies before us. Remember his bold bearing at Northampton.”

“ I have fought by his side,” said Brito ; “ and although I am now in arms against him, yet do I respect his valour, and had he but remained what he then was, I would rather have severed my arm from my body than have uplifted it against him.”

“ Were he my own brother,” said Reginald Fitzurse, “ and had worked so much woe in the bosom of the King, as this traitor hath done, I would take up arms against him ; and I hold him but a coward, and no true knight, who would stand by his Sovereign, and see him thus racked and torn to the heart without striking a blow at the aggressor.”

“ I would fain that our victory should be bloodless,” added Ranulph de Broc, “ although

I hate this haughty Primate to the death. But it will be well if we can compel him to withdraw these sentences without shedding his blood ; for, trust me, it would be no light matter, for pope and priest would proclaim him a martyr, and though he had no more sanctity than Durand the Dane, who cut down monks as the serfs do billet-wood, yet would they be ready to register him among the saints. I speak not this to save his life, for if he refuses to retract the sentences, hand and glove will I go with ye, until we have either compelled him,—or so left him that he shall never utter his curses again.”

Fitzurse muttered something which was inaudible, and De Broc departed to muster a sufficient force together to overawe the adherents of Becket, should they offer any resistance.

CHAPTER IX.

Why, what should be the fear ?
I do not set my life at a pin's fee ;
And, for my soul, what can it do to that,
Being a thing immortal.

SHAKSPEARE.

ON the following morning, as was his custom, Becket rose long before it was day, to pursue his studies, and the faithful Gryme only was allowed to intrude upon his privacy at these hours. It was a dark December morning when they sat together in the parlour of the palace ; the monk busied in bringing the wood fire to a blaze, while the primate was absorbed in the perusal of the writings of that great philosopher, Epictetus ; and as his fine features caught the

full blaze of the lamp which swung by an iron chain from the ceiling, as he pored over the ancient manuscript, or from time to time raised his head to impart some portion of the deep morals to the monk, he seemed like the great sage himself studying in his own cell, and forgetful that such a tyrant as Nero reigned.

“Gryme,” said he, at length laying down the volume, “how little have we who call ourselves Christians to boast of; here is an heathen, a Roman slave, who possessed more virtue, than can now be found in all our church, and studied in the stern school of self-denial until he taught himself to look on death only as a necessary change, and considered the paths leading thereto as equal, or if aught, that the shortest and easiest way by which tyrants have sent so many thousands. Who learnt to satisfy his wants with but little, without boasting of it—under-

went painful penances privately, and to sacrifice all that we mis-name pleasure, without seeking to be observed or admired,—looking upon all display as affectation and vanity, and unworthy of a philosopher.”

“These were iron men, holy father,” said Gryme, “who only studied to render life miserable, as if virtue consisted in depriving themselves of all earthly comforts, and nothing was acceptable to the Gods but a life of self-denial and pain.”

“There thou errest,” said Becket, “it was by self-denial that they first purified their natures from all gross passions, so as to render themselves acceptable to the Gods, believing that all evil springeth from ourselves; likening man’s stay upon earth to him who alighted from a vessel to gather shells upon the sea-shore, who when the captain beckoneth him away, must

throw down all he has collected, and hurry on again to the ship to pursue the voyage of eternity. And what have we done all our lives but gather shells on the shores of the eternal sea, wandering too often far away; and, had the captain called, how stood we prepared to resume our voyage? We lower our anchor by a rope of sand, and while we think ourselves safely moored, it is washed away, and all our honours buried deep beneath the ruin. Gryme," added he, arising from his seat and pacing the apartment, "how has my life been spent? what sacrifices have I made, regardless of the opinion of men, and only for the glory of the church? alas! but few. What privations have I undergone that I might render myself only more worthy of Heaven? None!—they have all been more or less mingled with the dregs of ambition; pride threw its admixture into the

cup, and vanity lurked in the lees, even the bitter draught was half drunk in vain-glory, and the empty cup upturned with a boast. I have wept and prayed, and undergone long nights of penance, counting the hours of my vigils by tears; but pride and passion, ambition and a love of power, still lurked within; they had possessed themselves of the inmost citadel, and stepped forth at pleasure, and drove all my virtuous resolves before them—closing the gates of the fortress, and showing themselves in triumph on the battlements.”

“ But few, holy father, can look upon their past lives without a reproach,” said Gryme; “ if man could here become a perfect creature, how little should we need another and a better state of life. Even among those shells which we pick up on the great shore, a few costly pearls are to be found; and amid all this evil there

surely lurketh some good, that we have gathered in our pilgrimage, and although we ourselves may be unconscious of it, yet fear not but that it will one day be discovered."

"I have lain awake all night," said the Archbishop, "and weighed myself in the balance, and although I am found wanting, yet have I no fear of death. No," added he, uplifting his eyes to heaven, "were it come upon me now, and all that I have done for the liberties of the church would add to my existence an hundred years, if I were to retract and give up all I have battled for, I would on this spot and at this moment prefer death, rather than sacrifice my duty to God, my conscience, and my honour. I speak of death, Gryme," added he, "as being near at hand, even on the very threshold. Believe me, that there is a closer affinity between our souls and death than we wot of, and that

the spirit hath warning when the time draws near at hand for its departure. Even our dreams are communings with the spirits of those who hover around us, and doubtless are sent to prepare us for the good or evil that is about to befall us."

"Thou art much wiser than myself in these matters, holy father," said the monk, "yet do I believe that many of these visions but spring from the malignant humours that mount into the brain."

"There are more in these things than we know of," replied Becket; "did not Calphurnia, the wife of Cæsar, dream the night before his death, that she beheld him stabbed in the Capitol? did not Mauritius the Emperor dream of Phocas, who killed him and became his successor? Was not Caius Gracchus foretold in a dream of the death that he should die, and

many others mentioned by the ancients? Look even at our own country, at those who were in communion with the spirits, and are now themselves saints in heaven, how many of them were forewarned of their own death. I tell thee that these things are not sent to us without an object; and more, that I have this night been warned that my end is drawing near."

"Heaven will yet prolong thy days," said the monk, "until thou hast accomplished the great work which it hath destined thee to do. Brood not over these melancholy thoughts, they but spring up through too much meditation, the long hours which you are wont to pass in prayer and solitude."

"Not so," said Becket in a melancholy voice, "these but brought on a feeling of weariness, in which the spirit too often sunk oppressed with exertion. But what I now feel is allied to

death : it is not fear, but a solemn certainty that rises beyond all other thoughts, and warns me that the hour is at hand. Even as when we feel the air hot and sultry, and see the nimble lightnings stealing from the darkening sky, until the whole heaven is black with clouds, and the loud thunder at last uplifts its voice,—so sure as these things foretel and usher in storm, does this internal foreboding warn me to prepare for death.”

“ Perhaps thou art ill, reverend father,” said Gryme, “ and needest a skilful leech. Let me summons hither Druro the son of Dromas ; he hath knowledge in all healing herbs.”

“ I am well,” replied the Primate, “ and free from all ailments. Mine will not be a death on the quiet couch,—a sinking under the infirmities of old age, that needeth the cup and caudle. No ;” added he, “ I shall perish in the quarrels

of the church. I have launched her thunders at too many heads to escape. I have humbled the proudest and most powerful in the land ;—have heard them mutter their vengeance without quailing ; and though I shall fall beneath it ere long, yet will I die as I have lived,—true to myself and the cause of Christ.”

“ They will not—they dare not molest thee,” said Gryme, with deep emotion ; “ all England would rise against them,—Rome would bare its powerful arm,—every true servant of the church would hold it a sacred duty to revenge such a deed.—No ; there are none daring enough to execute it.”

“ And yet I would not seek to escape the blow,” continued Becket, pacing the apartment with a firm step, while his fine features were lit up with all that spirit of military daring which had marked his course through life.

“No, were their swords uplifted over my head, and the revoking of one sentence which I have passed, would save my life, I would rather perish on the spot than retract a syllable of what I have uttered. I have looked on death,” continued he, “a thousand times,—have seen the warrior breathe out his soul on the battle field without a murmur, and beheld the victim of affliction writhing upon his couch;—have seen the monk die inch by inch in his cell, and the soldier hurled to instant death from the battlements; and have beheld all this without my cheek blanching. And shall I, who have shaken a realm by my power, and humbled the proudest of the earth, shrink from the last brief trial? No! may I have ‘Craven’ engraved on my tomb if I quail! and my name held up as a scorn and a derision to future

ages! I will die as I have lived,—unconquered!”

“ Pardon me, holy father!” said the monk, “ these were not the feelings which the heathen sages sought to inculcate ;—they suffered not to obtain fame after death, and which only falls on the cold tomb unheard, unfelt, unregarded. If I am in error, I have drawn the false conclusion from yourself.”

“ But they were not unconscious,” replied Becket, “ that fame would follow them to the grave ;—that their lives would be held up as examples to others ; and that thousands would kneel beside their tombs when they were no more. If their names are enrolled in the archives of Heaven, why should they not be held up in imperishable characters upon earth ? To gain Heaven is a holy ambition ; and to leave a name on earth, which shall be revered

when long ages have passed away, becomes man, who was born in the image of God, and endeavours to tread in the steps of the great and good who have passed away before him ?”

Gryme, whose reasoning was at times the clearest of the two, replied, and even brought many of the Primate’s own arguments to prove what he asserted ; but all were of no avail. Becket’s mind was a strange compound of right and wrong ;—his very character was made up of the most contrary elements,—doing that out of piety one moment, which was maintained the next by pride, and too often bringing all his learning to bear upon the falsest of principles ; even such as he had in this instance combated against at the outset. Nor was this altogether display ; for his knowledge and judgment in many instances held contrary sway : he had studied up to the part he had to perform, and if

he did condemn some of the scenes in which he acted; still he deemed it necessary to go through with them to uphold the character; concluding that in any other case he would have been guided by his better judgment, but believing that the honour of the church called for such sacrifices. What he did was generally done in sincerity; if he swerved, it was never without great cause;—danger could not move him;—as to self-interest, he despised it;—ambition was the only plague-spot upon him,—it raised him to his high eminence, and from it sprung all that was little in his character. And had he moved in another sphere of life—been the commander of an army, instead of the head of the church—there would but have been one opinion about his character, and few names would have ranked higher in English history.

But the hour of service now drew near; and

as the cathedral stood adjoining the palace, he arose to perform the morning devotions ; for many and unnecessary, as numbers of the forms of worship then were, he insisted on the most rigid fulfilment of them, all, and in general saw that they were performed under his own eye.

CHAPTER X.

What I did, I did in honour,
Led by the impartial conduct of my soul ;
And never shall you see, that I will beg
A ragged and forestall'd remission.

Alive, or dead,
He will be found like Brutus, like himself.

SHAKSPEARE.

IT was now past the noon of day, and Becket was seated in the hall of the palace, attended by Gryme, and others of his household ; when they were suddenly startled by the sound of voices, for the place was closely besieged. All saving the primate, showed symptoms of alarm ; but he scarcely deigned to raise his eyes from the missal he was perusing. Presently, four

men in armour entered the apartment, and sat down, without speaking, on a long oaken bench opposite the Archbishop; several men-at-arms also stood within the door-way. Becket saluted the mailed intruders, but they made no reply, and only knit their brows, or bit the ends of their gauntlets as they from time to time glanced upon him, or exchanged looks of dangerous meaning among themselves. Several monks who were in the hall, huddled together like a flock of affrighted sheep, were doubtless glad enough when they received a signal from Becket to retire; Gryme alone, out of the number, only remaining behind.

“What means this intrusion?” said the Primate, first breaking the painful silence, and speaking in a tone which scarcely accorded with the boldness of the interrogation. But not one of the knights replied, and the Primate gathered

courage as he again repeated the question, and added, "Speak, unless ye are ashamed to utter your errand. What would you with me?"

The knights gazed again upon each other, then looked savagely upon Becket, and, having muttered something among themselves, Reginald Fitzurse at last said, "We have come from the King; our business is to see that you absolve the excommunicated Bishops, and re-establish those whom you have suspended."

"Ah," muttered Becket, the blood instantly mounting his cheek, "you come from the King! and hath he then been bold enough to entrust you with such a commission?"

"We have brought no commission," replied Fitzurse, in a stern voice, "no parchment, with the broad seal of England affixed to it, that the Pope might hold as a bond, and utter his curses

until he obtained payment ; but we have come, with sharp swords and few words, to complete our errand."

"Such are the weapons of ruffians and robbers," said Becket, undaunted by their menaces, "and ye may carry them on the highways to lighten travellers of their mails. On me they will but be wasted."

"Speak in gentler terms," whispered Brito ; "he has been a brave soldier, and learnt to laugh at threats."

"Thou dost, then, refuse to absolve the Bishops," continued Fitzurse, with difficulty suppressing his fierce tones.

"I do," replied Becket, firmly, "unless they are willing to make submission, and abide by the decisions of Rome. As to the Archbishop of York, I will never recall his sentence ; but

have left him to be dealt with by his Holiness, the Pope, whose sanction I have had for what is done."

"Who gave you the Archbishopric?" said Reginald Fitzurse, in an authoritative tone, "the King or the Pope?"

"The spiritual power I hold from Heaven and his Holiness," replied Becket, briefly, "the mere temporal rights from the King; nor can he deprive me of them."

"Hath not the King given you all?" enquired Fitzurse, knitting his dark brows as he spoke.

"No, he hath not," replied Becket; "ye need not to have put such a question, well knowing that if he had, he could, ere this, have divested me of the power. I am not accountable to him for what I do."

Fitzurse gnashed his teeth, and grappled the

hilt of the dagger which was in his belt. The rest of the knights murmured deeply to themselves, and by their restlessness showed with what difficulty they subdued their feelings.

“It was but revenge that caused you to suspend and excommunicate the Bishops,” said Hugh de Morville. “They did but their duty, and merited it not.”

“Hugh de Morville, it is not for thee to dictate to thy superior,” said the haughty churchman. “Callest thou falling from their head, doing their duty? I, who stood up for their liberties, and would allow no one to trample upon their privileges with impunity; but underwent a thousand privations to ward off and baffle the invader. How did they reward me?—by going over to the enemy—by persecuting and punishing all who had the honesty to adhere to me during my exile. Thinkest thou, that I

have forgotten the sufferings of those who, barefooted and an-hungered, came for succour to my cell at Pontigny—who were banished and houseless beggars, while these unfeeling churchmen were fattening upon their spoils—were bartering their conscience and their creed, that they might pamper their gross appetites, preferring ease and comfort, and the world's possessions to the good of the church. Nay, went even the length to insult me in my misery, by sending taunting epistles, and insolent messages. And yet these are the men that I am to pardon, and such deeds as these you call duty."

"They did their duty, inasmuch as they obeyed the bidding of their King," replied De Morville, "and all are traitors who do not."

"Even as thou art," said Ranulph de Broc, who had by this time entered the hall.

"Hold thy peace!" said the Primate, turning

to De Broc; "lest I extend the curse which already rests upon thee, and doom all thy kindred to the third generation to share the dreadful sentence." Then addressing the knights, he added, "Think ye, that our duty to an earthly sovereign is paramount to that which we owe the King of Heaven? or that the rewards which may be showered upon us here, are worth a thought compared with those which are eternal, and may be gathered hereafter? Or, think ye?" added he, raising his voice, "that your threats or menacing looks, which, when put in force, can but torture for a few moments my body, weigh aught beside the holy resolves of my soul, that obeys no will but the dictates of Heaven, and which no earthly power can shake? If so, then are ye indeed to be pitied."

"We will do more than threaten," said the

fiery Fitzurse, but ill brooking the contemptuous look of Becket; "we will make ourselves feared, unless thou dost absolve all those who are under thy ban. Rise, knights!" added he, unsheathing his sword, "and remember your oaths; it is but a waste of time to hold further parley with him."

"Do as ye list," said Becket, confronting them, not a shadow of fear appearing on his countenance. "I stood firm in the hall of Clarendon, when a score of swords were pointed at my throat; nor can your weapons for a moment shake my firm resolve. Nor will I submit, were ye to kneel to me until your knees grew to the floor. Desist, Gryme!" added he, addressing the monk, who was about to ring a bell to alarm the monks; "we have no need of earthly aid. Heaven will preserve me if it be its pleasure; and I can never perish in a more holy

cause than that I am now maintaining. Ye have long sought my life," added he, again facing his enemies ; " have hunted me through the land like a beast of prey ; yet God delivered me from your vengeance, and the great work for which he preserved me is now accomplished ; the bond but wants sealing with my blood, and I am ready to finish the deed."

" Fly !" said Fitzurse, uplifting the point of his sword to within an inch of the Primate's throat, yet fearing to strike ; so much was he overawed by the bold bearing of Becket. " Swear that thou wilt never again set foot upon English ground, and thy life may yet be spared. Do this, or instantly absolve the bishops, or death is thy doom."

" Let us escape !" said Gryme, throwing himself at the Archbishop's feet ; " why wilt thou shed thy blood in quarrelling with those

who have neither the fear of God nor man before their eyes?"

"Keep thy tongue silent," said the Archbishop sternly; "and leave me not at last to think so meanly of thee, as that thou wouldst sacrifice thy duty to Heaven, that thou mightest breathe a few more brief days." The faithful monk shrank back at this rebuke. Then turning to the knights he added, "Ye were my servants, sworn liege-men to me, as your lord; nor have I as yet freed ye from your oaths. How dare ye thus to enter my palace, and threaten me in my hall?"

"We have bound ourselves by a new oath since that day," said De Tracy.

"And it will grieve me if we are compelled to keep it," added Brito.

Just then the bell sounded for service in the cathedral, and bidding Gryme lead the way,

the Archbishop again looked upon the knights and said ; “ Ye have heard mine answer ; nor must I longer delay the service of the church ; ” saying which he departed with a firm step through a door which led to the cathedral.

The knights arose to follow him with their swords ready drawn ; but they hesitated a moment, and the door was closed upon them. “ Ye are but cowards ! ” exclaimed Fitzurse, “ to allow him to escape ; let us follow.”

“ That name never belonged to me or mine,” replied De Morville, stepping up and confronting him. “ Why did you not strike when your sword was at his throat ? it was the action of a coward to withdraw it.”

“ Ye stood like idle spectators,” answered the fiery knight ; “ had I but have been encouraged by your looks only, I would have struck ; but ye all quailed before him.”

“ It is but wasting time,” said De Tracy, thus to bandy words with each other; let us to the cathedral and make him prisoner; unless he will absolve the bishops: and fulfil our purpose.”

“ A quiet prisoner shall he be, when I next look upon him,” said the savage Fitzurse, “ unless he does my bidding: I will make up for this delay.” So saying he led the way into the court-yard, and was followed by his companions-at-arms.

CHAPTER XI.

Look ! in this place ran Cassius' dagger through :
 See, what a rent the envious Casca made :
 Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabbed ;
 And, as he plucked his cursed steel away,
 Mark how the blood of Cæsar followed it ;
 As rushing out of doors, to be resolved
 If Brutus so unkindly knocked or no,

* * * * *

But yesterday, the word of Cæsar might
 Have stood against the world ; now lies he there,
 And none so poor to do him reverence.

Julius Cæsar.

DISREGARDING the advice of his faithful attendants, who with tears in their eyes, knelt down and implored him to fly, the undaunted Prelate commanded Gryme to take up the crucifix, and lead the way along the cloisters ;—for the voices of the monks singing vespers in the choir fell upon his ear. With folded arms, his haughty

head elevated, and his fine features possessing even more than their ordinary dignity, he traversed the pillared cloisters with stately and measured steps, while the long train of his rich dalmatica swept over the rudely carved grave-stones, under which so many of his pious predecessors slept. They entered the northern transept, and his followers lingered behind a few moments to secure the door. Becket turned upon them with a stern look, and exclaimed in a deep tone,—“ Why tarry ye there? fear ye to follow me?—if so retire, if not, in the name of God come along, for the hour of my last service draweth near.”

“ We would but render the outer doors secure, holy father,” replied a monk, “ that these men of blood may not pollute the threshold of Christ’s church by their unclean footsteps.”

“Would ye fortify the house of God like a castle?” exclaimed the Archbishop sternly; “unbar the door instantly, and let it not be said that the representative of Christ made a fortress of the holy Church to save his life;—unbar the door! and whichever of you feeleth his footstep to falter, follow me not.”

They all lingered behind, saving the faithful Gryme, who boldly preceded his master, bearing the silver crucifix before him, until they entered the church. The Archbishop lifted up his eyes as they gained the choir, and glanced at the vaulted and fretted roof, which stretched high above in its antique and gloomy grandeur, for the shades of evening were fast falling upon pillar and shrine; and the deep niches, in which stood the figures of many a saint and angel were already darkened. Down the long aisles, however, the last rays of

the sinking sun fell with a solemn splendour, and flashed upon the silver crucifix, which the faithful monk held up at arm's length, while a portion of the dying glory crimsoned the lofty brow of Becket, and fell upon his rich drapery, and he stood revealed like a god in the midst of his own temple, looking upon the vast pile, which seemed as if but reared for himself alone to dwell in.

Here and there too a lonely lamp cast its shimmering light along the shadowy and obscure crypts, half revealing the shrine of the silver Virgin, or stony saint before which it blazed, and giving a deeper darkness to the pillared recesses which its faint beams endeavoured in vain to illumine. The setting sun also gathered his golden garments around him, until the last gleam of splendour hung athwart the rainbow dyes of the rich window, falling along the edge

of a descending cloud like a streak of flame, then leaving the deepening twilight to gather over the massy pile,—slow, and solemn, and soundless as the approach of sleep.

Meantime the monks from the choir had struck up the vesper song, and the deep melody of their voices rushed through the pillared aisles like the solemn sounding of the ocean. Then the tones were hushed for a moment or two,—and at length a solitary voice, low and sweet, stole out amid the silence, so dreamy and ethereal, that it rang through the reigning quietude,—and sounded as if it came from the vaulted roof, or stole singing from pillar to pillar, for so played the echoes with the sound. Again the full burst of the choir broke in, like the rushing of the mighty sea, mingled with the deep pealing of the organ, until the whole building seemed to throb again beneath the

sounds. Becket stood unmoved listening to that flood of holy melody, with his head slightly bent, and his hands clasped together, as if he had been suddenly transported to heaven, and felt afraid either to look up or cross the sacred threshold.

There was something strangely solemn and impressive in the whole of the scene; the dim daylight which was fast fading away, and had in many places given way to the grey tints of evening,—the lamps which stood silently burning before the different shrines,—the huge pillars which assumed strange shadowy and gigantic shapes in the spreading gloom,—all wore a mysterious kind of grandeur, which, whether combined or taken apart, struck upon the soul with a feeling of holy awe, that scarcely seemed to belong to earth.

Even Becket was bound down for a few mo

ments beneath the mighty silence which settled far and wide over the vast cathedral: it was but for a moment, and he sprang up like the gallant war-horse, that but listens until the sound of the trumpet dies away,—then rears, and is ready for the coming combat. So did he, in a voice which startled the calm of the cathedral, bid Gryme lead on to the altar, while he followed with rapid strides, and with a glance which, as it caught the flashing rays from the silver lamps, seemed to kindle with daring devotion. A meet genius to preside over that magnificent pile, appeared Thomas à Becket, as he ascended the steps before the altar of St. Bennet, and drew up the folds of his flowing drapery with a dignity that became a god. Nor did the group that knelt around the base of the altar, bear an inapt resemblance to the assembled devotees, who seemed as if they

had met to worship the idol of their devotion ; and well did the stately figure of the Archbishop, which seemed to fill the wide space, bear out the illusion, that he alone was the great object which they were about to adore.

Scarcely had the Archbishop ascended the steps of the altar, before the sound of axes was heard without, hewing at the doors of the cathedral ; for in spite of Becket's remonstrance, the affrighted attendants had secured more than one entrance. All trembled, saving he whose life they sought ; but not a shadow of fear rested upon the Prelate : his lips were slightly compressed, and his calm eye traversed the length of the gloomy aisle, as if it sought amid the distant gloom to discover the cause of the uproar.

“ Fly, my beloved master !” said Gryme, his voice tremulous with fear, and scarcely audible

above the battering of the axes, as they rung upon the ponderous doors of the cathedral ; “ they will search for you in vain amid the dark crypts and subterraneous vaults of the building ; —escape ! and leave us to bear the whole burst of their anger : they will harm no one but yourself ; —it is your blood for which they thirst.”

“ Never !” replied the Archbishop in a firm voice ; “ were a thousand battle-axes brandished over my head, and each one could give me a separate death, I would not stir a foot. I have enlisted under the banner of Heaven ; and, by the help of God, will die in fighting the battles of the church.”

“ If not for your own sake,” continued the faithful monk, still retaining the hem of the mantle in his grasp, “ O refuse not to save yourself for the sake of the church of Christ,—”

the remainder of his arguments were lost amid the deafening din of the assailants; for the door was now broken open with a loud crash, which rent off the very hinges.

At this moment the form of Reginald Fitzurse was seen approaching, sheathed in complete mail, which flashed back the blaze of the lamps that still burnt before the shrines; while his sword, as he waved it above his head, also glittered in the trembling light. "Where is the traitor?" exclaimed he, approaching and brandishing his weapon; while his voice, which was hoarse and thick with rage, echoed loudly through the vaulted aisle. No answer was, however, made, and for a few moments only the mailed steps of the savage barons were heard as they came up the centre aisle.

"Where is the Archbishop?" vociferated the stormy Norman in a voice of thunder, which

was caught up and given back by the awakened echoes.

“Here am I, the Archbishop, but no traitor!” replied Becket in a firm tone of voice, and without either eye or lip betraying a symptom of fear. “Here am I, ready to suffer in my Saviour’s name! How dare ye enter into this holy place in arms? What want ye here?”

“Your life!” answered Fitzurse, briefly and terribly.

“Come hither!” said Tracy, pulling Becket by the sleeve; “thou art a prisoner.”

The Prelate jerked away his arm with such force, that the motion caused Tracy to stagger, and he would have fallen backward on the pavement, had he not caught the arm of Hugh de Morville and checked himself.

“Fly, or thou diest!” said Brito, striking the Archbishop on the shoulder with the flat of

his sword. But Becket stirred not ; and bold and brutal as these knights were, they at first feared to take away his life before the altar.

“ Fly, or thou art dead !” said the savage Fitzurse, uplifting his sword as if to strike. But the attendant Gryme, now fully aroused to the danger, upheaved the silver cross and struck the Norman such a blow, that had it not been for his steel helmet, he would never again have uplifted sword.

“ Ah ! dealest thou such blows with thy spiritual weapon ?” said Tracy, uplifting his sword, and aiming a blow at the monk ; but Gryme parried the stroke with the crucifix, and was again instantly at his master’s side.

“ Resist them not !” said Becket ; “ let them work their will upon me. Had it been my intention to resist, I would have met them in warlike guise ; it beseemeth not that the temple

of Christ should be turned into a place of combat. Then turning to Fitzurse he said; "I have done thee many pleasures; why comest thou with armed men against me?"

"To compel thee to absolve the bishops whom thou hast dared to excommunicate," replied Fitzurse, grinding his teeth as he spoke; "do this instantly, or I will assuredly wet my weapon in thine heart's blood."

"And who art thou?" said Becket, "that thou shouldst dare to demand such concession at my hands? Thou! a fellow that I did raise in my service while chancellor; or who mightest otherwise have passed thy whole life as a squire of low degree? No! I tell thee again that I will never absolve them, until they have offered me that satisfaction which I have named."

The angry baron ground his teeth with sheer rage, while he listened to these biting taunts;

and his eye-balls flashed with madness as he exclaimed, "Then die, thou base reviler!" and uplifting his sword, he aimed a blow at the head of Becket; which, although the faithful Gryme interposed his own arm, which was nearly severed, nevertheless wounded Becket in the shaven part of his crown, and the blood instantly fell down his face in a torrent. Still the Archbishop moved not; but clasping his hands together and bowing his head, exclaimed; "To God, to Saint Mary, and to the Holy Patrons of this church, I commend my soul and the church's cause." A second blow from the sword of Hugh de Morville brought him to the ground, and he fell at the foot of the altar; and even then folded his robe in "dying dignity," that he might perish as became the bold leader of God's church. A third blow was struck by the brutal Brito, with such force upon the head,

that his sword broke upon the pavement. Tracy dealt the last savage stroke; but it was scarce needed; for the outstretched limbs of the dying Prelate were fast stiffening into death.

Meantime the faithful monk, his arm nearly severed, and himself stunned with the blows which he had received, still lay on the pavement grasping the silver crucifix, and uttering curses upon the murderers.

“Sacrilegious and blood-thirsty villains as ye are!” exclaimed Gryme, forgetting his own sufferings while he gazed upon the bleeding form of Becket; “the vengeance of Heaven will yet overtake ye, and the blood of the holy martyr ye have slain will call aloud for vengeance, even when ye have passed the gates of death. Oh God!” added he in a low tone, writhing with pain; “I would that ye had

severed every limb of my own, so that his own life had but been saved."

"Silence, mad priest!" said the savage Fitzurse, wiping his bloody sword on the Archbishop's mantle, "lest I cram thy curses down thine own throat, and send thee full-mawed to Sathanas."

"Nay, e'en let him rail on," said Tracy; "he hath caught a knack of cursing from this arch-traitor, and it would be a task to beat that out of the whelp which he hath so long studied."

"I will silence him," said Fitzurse, about to deal him his death blow, when Hugh de Morville, who stood leaning upon his sword, as if in deep contemplation over the deed which they had done, struck aside the point of Fitzurse's weapon as it was aimed at Gryme, and said,—"Nay! he stood up boldly for his

master, thou shalt do him no further harm, we have blood enough upon our hands, and I would to God that I could as easily wash the stain from my conscience as I can cleanse it from mine armour.”

“And who gave thee a right to say what I shall not do?” said the fiery Fitzurse, standing with his weapon pointed to De Morville: “And what if I had an intent to let out the blood of this mumbling monk, thinkest thou I should crave thy permission? No, not if I were to shed thine to boot.”

“Reginald Fitzurse!” exclaimed Hugh de Morville with a look under which the stormy baron quailed, “I wish not to quarrel with thee, although it was through thine arguments that I was tempted into this bloody matter. But if thou darest to provoke me further, or injure a hair of the head of this priest who hath so nobly

suffered in the defence of his master, either thy blood or mine shall wash out the quarrel, even upon the floor of this holy pavement."

Here Brito and Tracy stepped in between the enraged knights, just as they were in the act to assail each other, and mingle their own blood with that which they had so barbarously shed.

The monks had by this time gathered in great numbers from every corner of the vast cathedral; and, had not the aisles been filled with armed men, their looks left but little doubt of the course they would have pursued. Many of them stood over the lifeless form of the Primate with torches in their hands, which cast a grim and ghastly glare on the pale features of the dead,—rendered even more pallid, by being contrasted with the lines of blood which had traversed either cheek. Great as was the agony of the faithful Gryme, he forgot his own suffer-

ings while gazing upon the bleeding corse of his beloved master, whose gory hand he held within his own, and bathed it with tears, while the blood trickled from his own shoulder and mingled with that of the Archbishop, in spite of the bandages with which they had so hastily bound it.

By this time the last tramp of the intruders had died away ; and no sound broke the awful silence that reigned around, saving the deep sobbing of the monks, as they stood revealed in the red and murky light of the torches, gathered around the dead body of their brave Archbishop. The silver crucifix had fallen upon the floor unregarded, and was in several places stained with blood,—while far away, throwing a feeble light along the gloomy perspective of the aisles, were revealed the lamps, as they burnt dimly before the various shrines, every

image of which seemed absorbed in silent grief, as if even the stony saints partook of the deep melancholy which had fallen upon all.

But this silence lasted not longer than while the murder was rumoured throughout Canterbury, and numbers instantly hurried to the spot, bearing with them the afflicted of all ages, that they might be healed by dipping their fingers in the blood of the martyr, for as such he was held. Onward rolled the dense crowd, each eager to mark the sign of the cross on their foreheads, and some of them, as they stooped forward, fell with their hands in the blood, and besmeared their features with it, which, as seen in the lurid light that was shed around, and rendered more awful by their loud lamentations, and hideous contortions of their visages, bore no bad resemblance to some of those unholy rites, over which the powers of evil

are said to preside. It was a scene that in any other age would have made the beholder shudder ; to have looked down upon that group, as they passed to and fro, until their faces were lost in the deep shadows of the cathedral, looking grimly and murderously upon each other, as if they all had been partakers of the deed ; even the cheeks of beauty were dyed with the blood of the martyr. But we will drop the curtain upon the scene, and bring our story to a close. Without following the fate of the murderers, we shall only add, in the words of the old chroniclers of the period, that they retired to the castle of Hugh de Morville, at Knasborough, in which they shut themselves up for a twelvemonth, and afterwards made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It is also on record that William de Tracy gave his manor of Docombe to the Church of Canterbury, to

expiate his guilt. Some have asserted that all the murderers died miserable deaths, soon after they had perpetrated the horrid deed ; but this is doubted, nor does it belong to our task to combat the opinions of history.

CHAPTER XII.

And so without more circumstance at all,
I hold it fit that we shake hands and part :

Like a cloistress, she will veiled walk,
And water once a day her chamber round
With eye-offending brine.

SHAKSPEARE.

It was at the close of a lovely day in autumn, when a jaded horseman entered the chase of Woodstock, and pursued his silent course along the sylvan paths which we have so often described. The countenance of the rider was care-worn ; his brow was marked with deep wrinkles, and his large black eyes wore a settled melancholy,—a sad softness which seemed to have quenched all their former fire. The noble animal on which he rode seemed to share the sadness which had fallen upon its master, and

as he had thrown up the reins, moved along at a slow pace over the ground, which was thickly carpeted with fallen leaves. The traveller glanced from time to time upon the scenery around him,—then bowed his head, and rode along in an attitude of deep thought; for the change that was wrought by the hand of nature had awakened a thousand solemn emotions in his bosom, and kindled the melancholy which had so long remained within. There was something in the rustling of the fallen leaves, and the faded foliage of the trees, now shorn of their summer beauty, in strange accordance with his feelings; and he heaved a deep sigh while he thought how soon all that is lovely to look upon perisheth!

“A fit livery do ye wear!” for so ran his thoughts while gazing around him upon the trees, “to welcome back your owner! Better

thus than if ye mocked me with the full-blown green of summer. The hand of time hath made deep ravages upon us both : the scenery and the master have changed ; nor will I ever again break the stillness of these green solitudes by the sound of the horn ;—no merry note shall ever again disturb this grave of all my pleasures. Oh, God !” continued he, still musing to himself, as he drew up his steed to gaze down a beautiful glade, on which the last sunbeams were shed ; “ here have I walked with Rosamond,—under yonder tree have we sat together ;—sometimes listening to the song of the nightingale, or the voice of Becket, as he made our hearts feel light by his wit. And where are they now ? The heart that loved me is mouldering in the silent tomb ! and the friend that I would once have died for, was butchered at the altar ! and the few hasty words which I un-

consciously let fall, were the cause of his death. Oh, ambition! thou art indeed the mother of misery! From thee springs all that is evil:—we offer up all our better affections for thee; and thou nursest our hopes until they become overgrown; and when we look for their fulfilment,—oh, misery!—all is hollow and false! and we sit down to gnaw our own hearts, and curse ourselves for our folly!”

So the unhappy monarch pursued his path, reproaching himself for being the cause of those ills, over which weak mortals have not always controul; for we are too often but the mere creatures of circumstance; and our firmest resolves are no guard against future evils, as they spring from long reflection; and danger itself takes us by surprise, leaving no time to ponder. The deed of the unguarded moment is too sudden to think upon, and in many instances is

done, ere even the will is apprized, and too quick for the judgment to reflect upon for even a moment; for our passions are often born without thought.

Henry halted not before the palace of Woodstock, but rode on until he reached the labyrinth, and dismounting at the entrance, he entered the well-known passages. He ascended the familiar stair, every step of which was damp and overgrown with grass and lichen. He pushed open the door, which grated harshly on its rusty hinges,—it was long since human foot had broken the silence of those apartments. The monarch stood with folded arms and aching heart, “a ruin amid ruins;” for all around was fast hastening to decay. A wild cat started from the cold hearth, where her young were nestled, and brushing by, shot through the broken casement; while the deep

hooting of owls only seemed to give a fitting voice to the solitude. All—saving the figures of the Madonna and Child—seemed in a state of decay. The faded arras was covered with mould ;—the floors were damp, and the furniture had a cold and uncomfortable look, and was covered with that slow-consuming vegetable matter, which in the end destroys everything. The blood ran cold in the monarch's veins as he stood in the gathering twilight, and gazed upon the silent destruction around him. He however mustered courage enough to enter into an inner apartment, where stood the couch on which Rosamond had slept in bye-gone years. But the moth and damp had also been busy there ;—there was a smell of death in the place. A hideous skeleton was stretched on what remained of the velvet coverlet,—it was all that was left of Gamas Gobbo ;—thither he had

crept for shelter in a former winter, and perished unknown to any one.

Henry hurried away with a faltering step and a heavy heart, and throwing himself into the saddle, galloped off in the direction of the nunnery of Godstow. It was dark when he halted before the gate of that ancient pile. A message was conveyed to the old Abbess, Agatha, that the King of England waited without; and she herself, now bent double with age, came to receive him.

“I have come, good mother!” said the King, “to kneel beside the grave of her who is now at rest; be speedy and conduct me thither.”

The old woman led the way into the chapel, and, bidding him wait a brief space, retired.

Henry gazed upon the vaulted and heavy pile, which was only lighted by the feeble lamps that burnt before the different shrines,

and seemed to deepen the shadows of the stunted and Saxon pillars, that adorned each side of the building. While he stood in silence gazing upon a scene so calculated to awaken solemn feelings, he heard a door open behind one of the massy columns ; then there was a sound as of the rustling of drapery, and presently the veiled figure of a woman rose before him. The form stood immoveable and silent beside the shrine of the Virgin ; and the light of the lamp just showed her features through the veil. Henry sprang back, and while his breathing became quick and heavy, and his eyes seemed ready to start from their sockets, he exclaimed in a faltering voice ; “ Speak ! speak ! if thou canst speak ! or if thou beest but the spirit of my own beloved Rosamond, make some sign that I may know thee. What art thou that

wearest her likeness beneath that veil ? and——
oh, answer me !”

“ I am no spirit,” said the form, in a sweet melancholy voice, and heaving a deep sigh ;
“ it is Rosamond Clifford that stands before thee,—she who was thy wife, but is now the bride of Heaven !”

“ Keep not that cloud between us,” said the King, drawing nearer ; “ but remove the veil that I may again look upon that face, the recollection of which I have wept over, deeming that its light had long ago been hidden in the darkness of the tomb.”

“ Approach no nearer, then,” said Rosamond,
“ and I will do thy bidding. Thou wert the first and only one that I loved ;—thou shalt be the last of thy kind to look upon me :—the eye of man shall never rest on me again.”
As she spoke, she threw aside the veil ; and

although she was robed in the sober habit of her order, and her countenance wore the traces of sorrow ; still the beauty of her fine features was undiminished. There were the same clear blue eyes ; but where they before swam in the tenderness of love, and shed a halo that made every heart beat ; they now wore a solemn softness,—the look of an enwrapt seraph whose thoughts all led heavenward. She looked like some masterly statue, too beautiful ever to have had a living resemblance,—something that stood mourning in marble,—as if the artist had tried his skill, and made a Goddess of sorrow, giving her the features of a Venus ; or endeavoured to chisel a sad look upon all that he could imagine of loveliness. It was a beauty to kneel before, but not embrace—a face that could only awaken such sensations as we feel when gazing upon some of those masterly crea-

tions which have delineated such features as bring before us the Virgin Mother, with all her love centered upon the Holy Child—in which the soul beams through the eyes, and nought but what is akin to Heaven reigns in the calm countenance.

Henry gazed upon her in silence, and stood as if rivetted to the spot, so much was he struck by the solemn grandeur of her beauty ; nor did he speak, until Rosamond uplifted her arm, as if she was again about to throw the veil over her lovely features. “ Stay ! in pity, stay a few moments longer ! ” said the King, bending his head nearer to her, without advancing a step : “ All that I loved in the world, saving thyself, are gone ; and thou, too, art about to leave me. Oh ! why didst thou throw this barrier between us ? and make a vow which is to separate us for ever ? Where can I now

look for comfort? Becket is no more. My children, stirred up by the revengeful Eleanor, have rebelled against me. Only those who call thee mother are faithful to me. They are indeed my sons. Let me appeal to Rome to absolve thee from thy vow : the savage queen is now in prison, where she shall end her days. Oh ! say that thou wilt give thy consent to be released from these trammels of the Church ; and I shall yet close my unhappy days in peace !”

“ It is too late !” said Rosamond, sobbing deeply, as she again threw the veil over her. “ Oh tempt me not further, Henry,” continued she, weeping aloud ; “ make me not sin against Heaven. Alas ! these feelings become not one who has devoted her future days to the service of God ; but I must tear them from me, although my heart will bleed afresh. Thou wilt

not forget my children ; and Eleanor thou must —” The last sentences seemed to tear up her very heart ; and she would have fallen on the cold pavement of the chapel, had she not been suddenly caught by a nun, who stood sheltered in the shadow of the pillar.

Henry sprang forward to support her ; but it was too late ; for a door suddenly opened, and Rosamond was forced in ; then it closed upon her for ever. The monarch fell, just as the last glimpse of her drapery vanished ; and when his eye rested on the ponderous door, he beheld the form of a crucifix, which was carved on the solid oak ; and he remained, almost unconsciously, kneeling before it. Rude as was this device, it awoke such sentiments in the bosom of the unhappy King as he had never before felt ; and, while he gazed upon it, he wept like a child ; for a sound, or a feeling,

went through his heart, which said : “ Here only canst thou find peace.” The monarch clasped his hands, and prayed unaware. It was no studied effort ; but his feelings shaped themselves into words. He confessed himself weak and sinful ; and felt thankful that God had brought him into such a state of humility. He arose, and felt his heart more at ease than it had been for many a long day. The tears which he had shed had fallen like the rain from a dark cloud, when the heaven again becomes clear : his earthly nature was refreshed by the shower. If all within was not yet happy, there was, at least, such a resignation as he had hitherto been a stranger to ; for he had never before thrown all his sorrows at the foot of the Cross of Christ.

To account for the presence of Rosamond we need only add, that the potion which she

swallowed on that fearful night, when Eleanor entered the labyrinth, had been prepared by Oliphant Uggleshred; and, had not fate ordained otherwise, it was his intention, after the Queen had departed, to have removed her to a place of security, where she would have been wholly in his own power. Although the draught was free from all strong poisonous qualities; yet, for several hours, Rosamond was in a state of unconsciousness; nor was it until she had lain some time in the chapel that she recovered. The joy and surprise of Maud, who knelt weeping beside her at the time, may be better imagined than described. None, saving herself and Pierre de Vidal (excepting the nuns of Godstow), knew that she was still living; the secret had been faithfully kept.

The minstrel was promoted to a high and honourable station in the King's service; and,

as he had long before won the heart of Maud, he had no difficulty in obtaining her hand. Their nuptials were honoured by the presence of Henry, and many of the Norman nobility ; and, as the King seldom resided at Woodstock, they occupied the chief apartments of the palace.

Queen Eleanor, as every reader of history is aware, was confined in a prison, from which she was never released until the death of the King. We shall not dwell upon Henry's penance at the shrine of Becket, where he knelt all night on the cold pavement, and bared his shoulders to the lash of the monks ; neither does it belong to our task to comment upon the rebellion of his sons, and all those domestic calamities which embittered his latter days. Suffice it to say, that he died with a full conviction, that the road to ambition

is beset with thorns ; that power brings not happiness ; nor immense possessions peace ; and that “ he who sows the wind must expect to reap the storm.”

NOTES.

“THE history of ‘Fair Rosamond’ has been enveloped in romantic traditions, which have scarcely any foundation in truth ; but which have taken so firm a hold on the popular mind, and have been identified with so much poetry, that it is neither an easy nor a pleasant task to dissipate the fanciful illusion, and unpeople the ‘bower,’ in the sylvan shades of Woodstock. Rosamond de Clifford was the daughter of a baron of Herefordshire, the beautiful site of whose antique castle, in the valley of the

Wye, is pointed out to the traveller between the town of the Welsh Hay and the city of Hereford, at a point where the most romantic of rivers, after foaming through its rocky, narrow, bed in Wales, sweeps freely and tranquilly through an open English valley of surprising loveliness. Henry became enamoured of her in his youth, before he was king * * * but long before his death Rosamond retired to lead a religious and penitent life, into the 'little nunnery' of Godstow. As Henry still preserved gentle and generous feelings towards the object of his youthful and ardent passion he, made many donations to the 'little nunnery' on her account ; and, when she died, the nuns, in gratitude to one who had been, both directly and indirectly, their benefactress, buried her in their choir, hung a silken pall over her tomb, and kept tapers constantly burning around it. These few lines, we believe, comprise all that is really known of the Fair Rosamond. The legend, so familiar to the childhood of all of us, was of later and gradual growth—not been the product of one imagina-

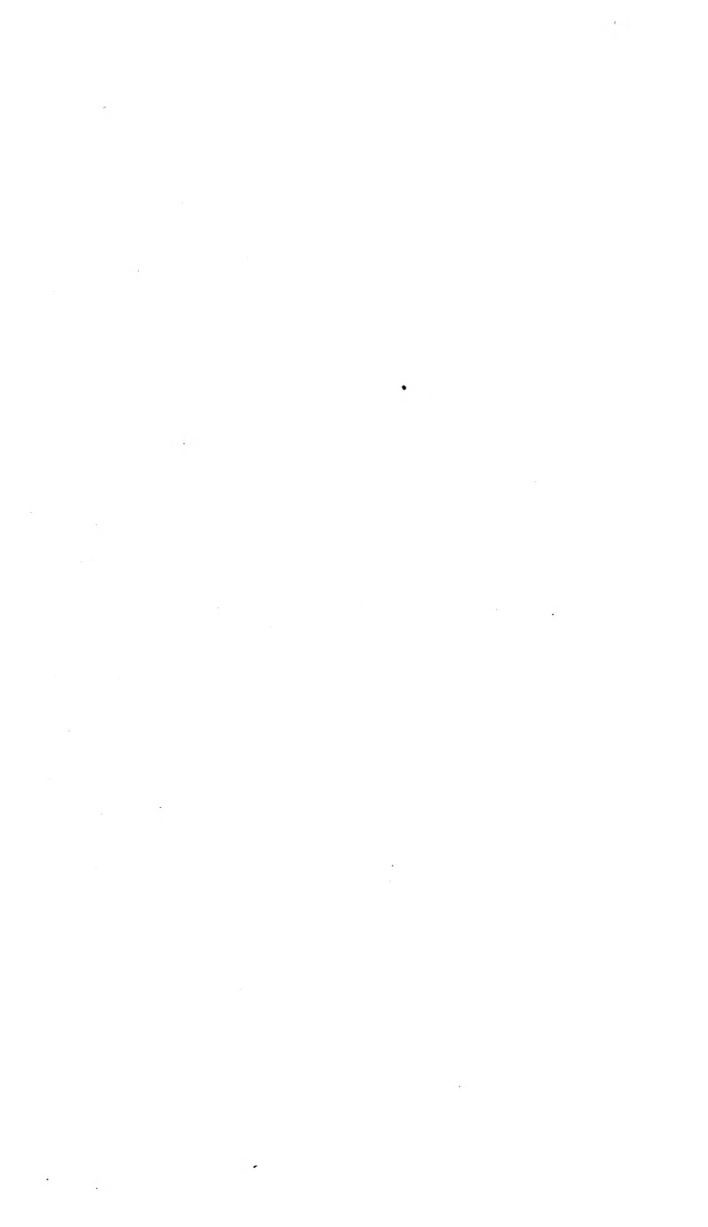
tion. The chronicler Brompton, who wrote in the time of Edward III., or more than a century and a half after the event, gave the first description we possess of the secret bower of Rosamond. He says that, in order that she might not be 'easily taken unawares by the queen,' Henry constructed, near 'Woodstock, a bower for this most sightly of maidens,' of wonderful contrivance, and not unlike the Dædalean labyrinth; but he speaks only of a device against surprise, and intimates, in clear terms, that Rosamond died a natural death."—*Pictorial History of England*, vol. i. p. 481.

"Drayton* says that the ruins of Rosamond's labyrinth, together with the well, which was paved with square stones at the bottom, and also her tower, were yet remaining in his time. The labyrinth was altogether underground; being vaults arched and walled with brick and stone, almost inextricably wound one within another; by which she was at any time able to escape from her pursuers; and

* Michael Drayton was born before Shakspeare.

could, if necessity required, let herself out by numberless private passages, many furlongs round about Woodstock.”—*Notes to Drayton's “HEROICAL EPISTLES.”*

THE END.





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